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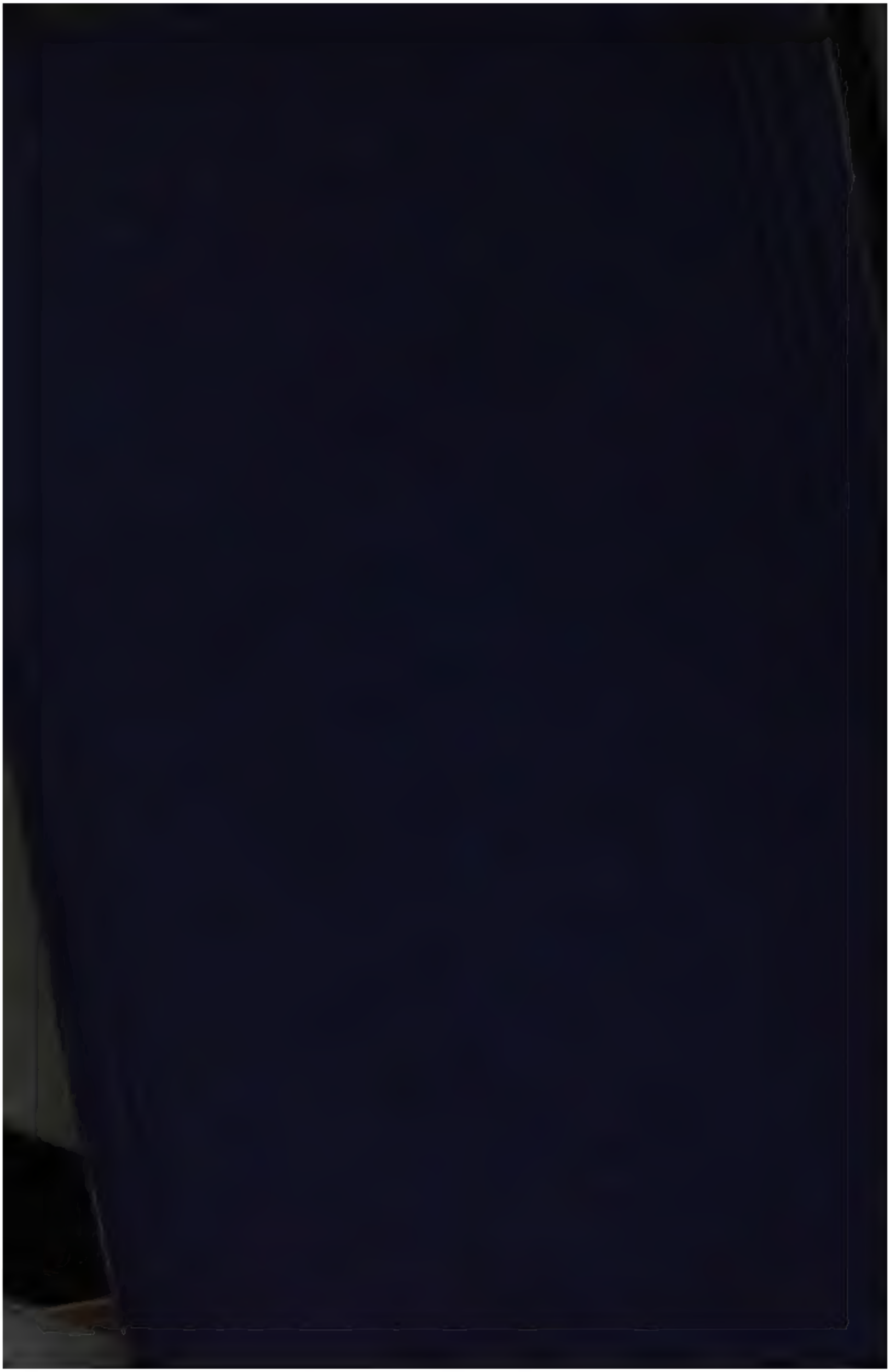

SERMONS

FOR

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN KEBLE,

AUTHOR OF "THE CHRISTIAN YEAR."

SOLD BY

JAMES PARKER AND CO. OXFORD,

AND 377, STRAND, LONDON.

1875.

PRINTED BY THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY TRINITY,
HOLY ROOD, OXFORD.

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SERMON I.

CHRIST OUR LIGHT.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

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"The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace."

THE True Light, the Light of Heaven, is in very many respects like the ordinary day light; and in this among the rest, that both come on very gradually. For hours and hours before the sun rises, the morning twilight, as you know, begins, and any one travelling, or lying awake, is aware of one token after another, that the deep darkness is passed, and the clear day will soon be here. The bright morning star arises higher and higher in the East, there is cock-crowing, and the small birds may be perceived uttering their faint voices in their nests; a kind of silvery glow begins on the very edge of the Eastern sky, and keeps on brightening and brightening, and often breaks into most brilliant lines, and masses of all the most beautiful colours: and then at last, almost before men are aware, while we perhaps are looking quite another way, the full round dazzling sun is to

be seen above the horizon, and it is once more perfect day.

And so it was, as you know, before our Lord, the Sun of Righteousness, arose in His Excellent Glory upon this lower world. For a long while darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people: they could not see anything as it really was, they could not discern between good and evil, God their Creator and the evil spirits their enemies: and when the Son of God took flesh and began to deliver them, still He did in a measure hide Himself. He disclosed not all His glory and greatness at once, but gave one token after another of His Presence; He manifested Himself, even to His best beloved, not all at once, but by little and little. And this He did for two reasons especially. His will was both to prepare us for His Coming, and to deal gently with us when He came. Because He is merciful, He gives us ample warning, so that it is our own fault only, our own most grievous fault, if He finds us off our guard. "[a]He knoweth whereof we are made, and remembereth that we are but dust," and therefore He came not in His glorious Majesty, He put not forth His Divine Brightness, when He came: for the reason which He Himself signified to Moses, when he had said, "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy Glory." The Lord answered, "[b] Thou canst not see My Face, for there shall no man see My Face, and live. While My Glory passeth by, I will put thee in a clift of the Rock, and will cover thee with Mine Hand, and thou shalt see My back parts, but My Face shall not be seen." He warned His servant beforehand, and He

[a] Ps. ciii. 14. [b] Ex. xxxiii. 20, 22, 23.

shewed him not all at once. And so it was at the time of His blessed Incarnation, of which the vision seen by Moses was a type. The True Sun rising upon the earth, had a twilight and a dawning beforehand, and now that Christmas Eve is come, we seem to be at the end of that dawning and twilight, and on the very edge of the sun rising. Christ the Lord has been coming gradually towards us, with the merciful purpose, that we might prepare ourselves for His coming. Have we done so? and if not, what is now to be done?

One clear and glorious warning of sunrise is the morning star mounting high in the East; and one sure and very solemn token which went before the rising of the Sun of Righteousness was S. John the Baptist, born "to prepare His way." The words of my text concerning "the Dayspring from on high" were sung or said, as you know, at the Baptist's Nativity, by his father Zacharias. He had been promised long before, as the Messenger "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord;" and the Church reminded us of him last Sunday, and we were also reminded of the clergy, whom Christ has ordained to do the same works for us. Well, did we attend to what the Church told us last Sunday? Have we tried to keep it in mind? Great pity surely it would have been, had the people of S. John's time turned away from him, when his light was burning and shining before them; and is it not great pity when Christian people will not hearken to the admonitions of the clergy, when they turn a deaf ear to the trumpet which tells them that the great King is at hand?

S. John's birth was a great wonder, an aweful and blessed sign of the Coming of the Son of Man; and so was the breaking of Zacharias' silence, the opening of his mouth to declare the counsel of God, by the Holy Ghost wherewith he was filled. Prophecy had been silent; there had been no Prophet in Israel since the time of Malachi, now near four hundred years; and that prophecy should begin again, the voice of God once more be heard sounding from heaven, was in itself a great and fearful sign. And moreover it was one of the fore-ordained signs. Before the great day of the Lord shall come, "[c] your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams." And in our time, my brethren, the Holy Scriptures read in all Churches, and the Creed of the Church in every child's mouth, what are these but a prophetic word from the Most High, assuring us of the Great Day, and leaving us without excuse if we will not think of it in earnest?

These were great tokens of the Eternal morning; but "the Dayspring from on high" which Zacharias was speaking of was something infinitely more blessed, aweful and mysterious. Remember when his hymn was uttered. It was at the circumcision and naming of his child: and remember who was present there; the Blessed Virgin Mary, being now great with Child, and that Child the Holy Jesus. Immediately after she had conceived in her womb, and was with child by the Holy Ghost, (i.e. immediately after the Incarnation of God the Son) the holy Mary arose and went into the hill country, and entered

[c] Joel ii. 28.

into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elizabeth, and abode with her three months: i.e. she staid with her until her child S. John the Baptist was born. And to this visit of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may believe, Zacharias was alluding, when he said, "the Dayspring from on high hath *visited* us;" meaning by the Dayspring from on high, not his own child S. John, nor yet the holy Mother of our Lord, but rather our Lord Himself, as yet unborn, who was even there present among them in His Mother's womb. And because He was yet unborn, His presence is not called the Sun-rising, as in some other places, but simply the Dayspring or dawn, the morning twilight, the glow which proves that the sun is near, and tells plainly where we are to look for him.

And now in keeping Christmas Eve, we, of Christ's family, do in spirit go back to those hours of expectation; we are awaiting the solemnity of Christ's Birth, as the very few who knew the aweful secret of His miraculous conception, went on awaiting the Birth itself. Week after week went on, bye and bye came the order of Cæsar Augustus which drew the Holy Family to Bethlehem. And now we may see with our mind's eye, Joseph and Mary on their journey. Their coming to Bethlehem was, in a way, the last sign of the wonderful and saving Sunrise, the very Eve of the first Christmas Day. Christ unseen came with her, and nothing remained but for Him to come forth into the open day, and begin to shew forth His brightness to all men.

And is it not so, that even now the same Jesus Christ, God and Man, is drawing near to each one

of us; unseen as He was there; for He was then in His Mother's womb, as now He is invisible in His glory in heaven. But not more surely, did He in flesh draw near to Bethlehem with S. Joseph and His blessed Mother, on or just before that first Christmas Day, than He is even now drawing near each one of us in Spirit, and trying us, whether or no we will attend to the many tokens He hath given us of His approach. The holy pair, Joseph and Mary, we know, made vain endeavours to find a lodging in Bethlehem. "There was no room for them in the inn," wonderful providence! that David's King, and his God, should be compelled to lodge out of doors, in the very town of David; that for the resting place of His Sacred Head, He condescended to find no better place than a manger, with an ass and an ox feeding (so it is said) one on each side of Him.

Now whether there was fault in these Bethlehemites finding no room for them in the inn, or whether it was what we call an accident, the warning, my brethren, to you and to me, and to all within reach of the Gospel, is just the same. We know beforehand what those Bethlehemites could not know, Who He is that will come among us to-morrow; and Who is even now saying to us, "Prepare Me a lodging in your hearts." We are as persons withinside of a house, who have heard one speaking at their door, late, it may be, in the evening, who know well enough, who it must be that is knocking. If people under such circumstances do not arise and open the door, it can only be because they care very little about him who is waiting to come in; or because they have used him ill, and are afraid and ashamed

to look him in the face. Hear His own expostulation; the merciful and tender words of the great Owner and Governor of all, while He is vouchsafing to wait and linger outside the door of your heart, not bearing to go away, and leave you to your ruin. "[d]Behold," He says, "I stand at the door and knock; If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come into him, and sup with him and he with Me." And He has given up all for you, He has "poured out His soul unto death;" He is even now marked with the five cruel wounds He received in your behalf upon the Cross; and what is it He asks from you? Why does He court a lodging in such a place as you know your heart to be? For no good at all to Himself, but for the greatest possible good to you. For He is seeking, my brethren, to have Himself spiritually born in you. He once promised and who may gainsay Him?—"[e]Whosoever shall do the Will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister and *mother*." If you do His Father's Will, He accounts you His own mother; i.e. He condescends to be spiritually born within you; and to have His own Image and likeness gradually growing in your heart and life, until it be come, as it were, to a perfect man. And even if you have once been His, and have swerved from Him, He does not give you up. His servants and Apostles, whose charity, great as it was, could not of course be compared with the heavenly charity of Jesus Christ; S. Paul, our Lord's ministering servant, did so yearn after some who had transgressed and forgotten his teaching, that he wrote to them "[f]My

[d] Rev. iii. 20. [e] S. Matt. xii. 50. [f] Gal. iv. 19.

little children, of whom I travail in birth again, till Christ be formed in you." He loved them as his very own, with the love not only of a father, but of a mother. His love of them was so great, his fear of their going wrong so urgent, his sense of the importance of *this* moment so overwhelming, that he could compare it to nothing but the travail-pangs of a mother. If S. Paul, an under-shepherd, so felt for his own flock, how much more the Saviour and God of S. Paul, Who by His Spirit poured into the Apostle's heart all the love he ever did, or at any time could bear to sinners! O depend upon it, how sinful soever you may have been, He longs very exceedingly to be spiritually born again in you. Your undutifulness has not tired Him out; He is yet knocking at your door, where you have kept Him waiting, it may be, many years; nay before now, you have perhaps rudely bidden Him begone. The least surely that any of us can do, is to welcome with a glad and thankful heart Him Who so lovingly comes again to visit us. To be rude and sullen to a visitor, though he were quite unknown, is a churlish, hateful thing, and so accounted even among the heathen; the common feeling of all mankind rises up against a man who can behave so. What then, if you be found hereafter, in the hearing of all men and all Angels, guilty of shutting out your best and only Benefactor, seeking in so many ways to come to you for your good?

Those who lie in bed for hours and hours after it is full daylight, and while they are being warned again and again, who pities them when their wilful sloth ends, as it is sure to end, in the loss of their

best opportunities for thriving in the world and doing good? The Wise man tells us, what the end of the sluggard is. He goes on indulging himself in "[g]a little more sleep, and a little more slumber," and ruin steals on him, incurable ruin. "His poverty cometh as one that travelleth, and his want as an armed man." Who will pity, when Christ shall come the second time, and you shall be found helpless and ashamed, in all the misery of sin unrepented and unforgiven, because you would not listen to His yearly warnings, how to make use of the mercies of His first Coming? Christmas is now a joyful word to almost all of us, because of the earthly comforts and refreshments which the time commonly brings with it; but it will be a fearful word bye and bye, if in looking back to past years, we shall have to confess, that we have kept so many of Christ's Birthdays, with hardly one serious thought of Christ, that we have enjoyed the carols, the holidays, the good cheer, the merry meetings, but never applied ourselves to repenting of our sins, nor to serious thoughts how we may learn to love Him, Who hath so freely and wonderfully loved us. Why the very dumb creatures do not think only of the food that is given them; they acknowledge it in ways of their own, with peculiar thankfulness, when it is dealt out to them by a well-known and kindly hand. How miserable, then, how shocking, for the redeemed children of God to care only for what bodily comforts His Holy Seasons may bring with them, and have no real welcome, no welcome of the heart for the Incarnate and Crucified Saviour offering to come and dwell with them for ever.

[g] Prov. vi. 10, 11.

God forbid, my brethren, that it should be so with any of us! but, that it may not be so, we must welcome our Lord when He comes; we must use the Light of heaven when it shines upon us. It will do us no good to gaze on it, as something very bright and beautiful. We had better sit in darkness and the shadow of death, as our heathen forefathers did, than lie on our slothful beds, aware of the presence of the true Light, but wanting heart to get up and do our day's work according to our Master's Will.

The Holy Ghost says to the Church of God, and to every Christian soul "[h] Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee," the light cast on thee by Jesus Christ the Fountain of Light. Let us not make believe that it is dark; let us open our eyes, and follow the Light where it guides us. Let no man say, I had rather lie still and indulge my present dreams of happiness and enjoyment here in this present world. You know in your inmost conscience that they are but dreams. How can you bear to go on indulging in them? "[i] The world passeth away, and the lust thereof"—the enjoyments of this life are but as dreams, but the Light from heaven, the Light of Christ, is no dream; it is the only real thing, and the way in which it offers to guide you, is the true and only way of Peace. Just as the ordinary light of the sun, shews us our way in ordinary matters, and by it we are kept from stumbling and falling and are enabled to go about our work in comfort, and to bring it at last to the desired end, so is Jesus Christ to our souls. He comes to be our true Light,

[h] Isa. lx. 1. [i] 1 S. John ii. 17.

to shew us the way, to keep us from sin and dangerous error, to cheer us on the road, to change us by degrees into the likeness of Himself. But a man who should wilfully keep his eyes shut, would receive no benefit from the sun's light, no more shall we from the Light of Christ, if we choose to shut our eyes, or to look altogether another way.

SERMON II.

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

PSALM xix. 5.

"In them hath He set a tabernacle for the Sun: which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course."

THERE is no doubt that this verse describes the Nativity of our Lord, and therefore the Psalm which contains it was appointed not by our Church only, but generally throughout the Christian world, as one of the proper psalms for Christmas Day. For, says an old Father of the Church, "It was sung concerning Christ, seeing that we find it here written, He cometh forth as a bridegroom out of His chamber. I think thou canst not fail to know Whom the Psalmist is here speaking of. He it is, Who as a bridegroom, when the Word was made flesh, found His chamber in the Virgin's womb: there He joined or wedded to Himself the nature of man, our nature: and from thence, as from a bridal bed, chaste and pure beyond expression, He cometh forth, in mercy humbled beneath all, in Majesty mighty above all: for such is the Psalmist's meaning, when he says, He rejoiceth as a giant to run His course: He was born, He grew

up, He taught, He suffered, He arose, He ascended: He ran on His course, He lingered not on His way."

Thus the sun, that we see in the eastern heavens, is made to us an image of our Incarnate Lord and Saviour, issuing from the Virgin's womb to be the light and life of His Church: and we are taught so to interpret the Psalm, not by any fancy of our own, but by the express testimony of the Holy Spirit of God: for the Spirit of God guided S. Paul's pen to apply certain words of this Psalm, "Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world," to the preaching of the Apostles: and not without the same Spirit, be sure, did the whole Church from the beginning use the rest of the Psalm in the like high and spiritual meaning.

We are then to consider the rising sun as ordained of God to be a figure, token, or shadow, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, born, as on this day, of the blessed Virgin Mary. Nor is it any new or strange thing, for Holy Scripture to give such a turn as this to the works of nature, the things which we see daily. The lessons which even children learn, out of what are accounted the plainest parts of the Gospel, are enough to show that the whole world is full of parables. Take such a common thing as the growth and use of bread-corn. Everything about it, the sowing of it, its silent growth, its mixture with tares and weeds, the harvest, the threshing-floor, the winnowing-fan, the leavening of it when ground into meal, the kneading of that meal into loaves, the breaking and eating of those loaves: all is made, in one Gospel or another, or in the teaching of S. Paul, to bear a high and holy signification, to be a token of

something relating to the kingdom of heaven. No wonder then, if so bright and glorious a creature as the sun rising in the heavens be also set forth to us as a token of something spiritual: and in fact we find that not in this place only, but elsewhere not seldom in the Book of God, it is made the token of our Lord's most holy Nativity. I will mention two instances in particular.

The prophet Malachi, providing God's people with comfort in that long silence of prophecy, which was to begin from his time (for he was the last of the old prophets), left with them, among many terrible warnings, this cheerful one, concerning the day of the Gospel: "[a]Unto you that fear My name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise, with healing in His wings." Where the glory of our new-born Lord is compared to the bright clouds, sometimes called "[b]the wings of the morning," which spread on each side and before the sun at his arising, and that with a healing, a refreshing power, driving away gloomy dreams, and encouraging all to go about their day's work cheerfully: and more than that, warming and kindling the benumbed world into a life not its own; as our Incarnate Lord by His touch, brought life and healing to our nature which was dead in sin.

Thus far the prophet Malachi, in whom the voice of the prophetic spirit ceased for a while out of Israel. When it was heard sounding again, in the mouth of Zacharias, the father of S. John the Baptist, it took up as it were the same note, like a person who had fallen asleep in the midst of some heavenly strain of music: I say, the voice of prophecy, on its awakening,

[a] Mal. iv. 2. [b] Ps. cxxxix. 9.

presently began again to speak of our Saviour, as of the sun arising in the East. "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us: to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace." As yet it was only the dayspring, the morning twilight, because our Lord was not yet born: but His Incarnation had been made known; it had been declared from heaven that He was already in that chamber, from which in a few months He should "go forth as a bridegroom, and rejoice as a giant," or warrior, "to run his course."

And here one may just notice by the way, what a light these texts of Scripture throw on that ancient custom of the Church, to pray, if conveniently it might be, towards the East: a custom which as you know we still keep up, so far as this, that we turn to the East at the Creed, and that the chancels of almost all churches are at the east end of the church, and the altar or table at the east end of the chancel. And on this matter I think it best to use the words of a great and good man of our own Church, speaking on a subject very like this. "Such ceremonies," he says, "are most profitable against all who derogate from the honour of Jesus Christ; they shew a reverent regard to the Son of God."

But to proceed: the sun in the heavens, especially the sun rising, being thus undoubtedly a sort of token or figure of God shining in the Person of our Saviour on the darkness of this world: what can we do better, now on His own day, than set ourselves humbly and thoughtfully to consider the deep doctrine herein contained, and the aweful yet blessed duties, binding upon us all?

First then, every one may understand that as the sun is beyond comparison the brightest object in these outward and visible heavens, so the great privilege of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom and Church of God's saints, is to have the Sun of Righteousness, God made Man, especially present, abiding and reigning in it. It is the kingdom and Church of Christ: that is all its hope and glory. And the same is true of every soul which is inwardly and spiritually conformed to God's holy Church; which has, as our Lord speaks, the kingdom of God within it. It is full of Christ: not of the name only and profession, of the shadow and fancy, of the dreamy and deceitful feeling, which some mistake for Christ; but of Jesus Christ Himself, silently and mysteriously coming in and dwelling there; according to His own unspeakable promise, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode in him."

Secondly, as Christ is a Sun to His Church by His glorious abiding in it, so the manner in which He came to be so is likened, you see, by the divine Psalmist, to "a bridegroom coming out of his chamber." He proceedeth forth and came into the world out of the womb of the blessed Virgin, where He had married, i. e. united for ever, the nature of God to the nature of man, by taking on Him our flesh, of the substance of that His blessed Mother, and that without spot of sin, to make us clean from all sin.

Therefore S. John the Baptist calls Him the Bridegroom: S. John, who, before they were either of them born, had leaped in the womb for joy, at

notice of Christ's having taken on Him our flesh, which Scripture, you see, calls a divine marriage;—the same S. John long after, remembering and renewing the same aweful joy, spake thus of Christ's Person and office; "[c] He that hath the bride, is the Bridegroom: but the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled."

In those words S. John rejoices, even as the Angels rejoiced on Christmas morning: but in the text we are told of another joy, a joy on our Saviour's own part. "He rejoiceth as a giant to run his course." And what sort of a course was it, as far as this world saw it? It began in poverty, and ended in a cruel death: began in a stable and ended on the Cross. He was "[d] despised and rejected of men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:" His people, even His own relations, "hid as it were their faces from Him;" He was "despised and they esteemed Him not." True, His course was to end in "[e] dominion, and glory, and a kingdom," but as far as it reached here on earth, He was altogether as one "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted:" and so He knew beforehand that it would be. Yet to all this He bowed Himself of His own accord; left in a manner that glory which He had with the Father before the world was, and stooped to be made perfect through sufferings: because it was His Father's will, and our salvation.

I wish we thought more of this, as often as any worldly wrong, or pain, or hardship comes upon us.

[c] S. John iii. 29. [d] Is. liii. 3. [e] Dan. vii. 14.

I wish we had at least so much thought of the Cross of that Saviour whose Name we have so often in our mouths, as to take cheerfully that little portion of it which it may please Him to lay on ourselves. Such patient cheerfulness would prove at last to have been the mother of great and holy joy: even as our Lord's willing obedience unto death was crowned with a Name which is above every name. He rejoiced then as a warrior in His hard warfare: now He rejoices as a conqueror in His glorious kingdom.

For, as the Psalmist goes on next to tell us, He is still in a certain sense running His course. He "goeth about," like the sun, "unto the uttermost part of the heaven, and runneth about unto the end of it again, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." That is, our Saviour, God, made Man, born for us, and crucified and risen again, fills the whole Church and the whole world. He is every where among Christians, every where and in all times, and in all portions of His Church and in each single individual baptized into it, high and low, little and great, rich and poor, wise and foolish, nay, and I will add good and bad; since we learn from the Catechism, that both are made members of Him, and we read in His own words, that there are branches in Him which bear no fruit, and must be cut off; as well as those which the Father loves, and which He only corrects that they may bring forth more fruit.

Thus is Christ whole in His whole Church and in every part and member of it; as the sun in the firmament shines impartially on the whole world beneath him, and in his circuit visits each part in

turn with his warming and life-giving beams. But Christ's faithful and considerate people are more particularly made aware of His presence by the outward means of grace, and the visible ordinances of His holy Catholic Church. Let us consider them one by one, and see if He be not especially present in each of them.

Look first at the Book of God. Is it not full of Christ throughout? Is not He "'[f] the end of the law for righteousness?" To say nothing now of the New Testament, did not "[g] all the prophets, from Samuel, as many as have spoken, likewise foretell of His days?" Are not the Psalms in honour of Him, and therefore called "Spiritual Songs?" What were all the holy men of old, but so many types and figures of Him? Was not Abel, in figure, Christ suffering; Noah, Christ preparing the Church for the saving of His elect; Abraham, Christ as the father of the faithful; Isaac, Christ offered on the Mount; Joseph, Christ rejected by His brethren; Moses, Christ mediating between God and His people; Aaron, Christ sacrificing; Joshua, Christ victorious; Samson, Christ slaying His enemies in His death; David, Christ a king; Solomon, Christ anointed with the Spirit of Wisdom; Jonah, Christ rising again? These, and many more than these, nay, the whole Hebrew nation, were but so many figures and pledges of Him that was to come, in Whom all should be summed up.

And now He is come, is not every thing in the Christian world fuller of Him than it had been in the Jewish world before? Are not our prayers, the

[f] Rom. x. 4. [g] Acts iii. 24.

prayers of the Church, offered up wholly and only in His Name? Is He not in the Church ministry, with those His Apostles, and the Bishops and Priests their successors, with whom He has promised to abide even unto the end of the world? Certainly, S. Paul speaks always as if Christ were so among us: as where he says, "[h] We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." And again, "when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ." And again, "since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in us." Christ is therefore in every true minister of His, in every act of his ministerial office.

Observe also if He be not, in a remarkable manner, in the holy days and times of His Church, from one end of the year to the other. The Sunday we know is His own day, called from the beginning by His name, the Lord's Day. Circumcision, Epiphany, Ascension, and other such days; they too are plainly His days, for they are kept in remembrance of great things done or suffered by Him. And are not the days of His saints, His days also? They are so accounted by the same wise and holy writer, some of whose words I a little before mentioned. Hooker says, "These days and times have all relation to our Head." Again, he adds, "Forasmuch as we know that Christ hath not only been manifested great in Himself, but great in other His saints also, the days of whose departure out of this world are to the Church of Christ as the birth and coronation days of kings and emperors; therefore, especial choice being made of the very flower of all occasions in this kind,

[h] 2 Cor. v. 20.

there are yearly times chosen to meditate of Christ glorified in them" (he means the Holy Innocents) "which had the honour to suffer for His sake, before they had age and ability to know Him, glorified in them, which knowing Him, as Stephen, had sight of that before death, whereunto so acceptable death did lead; glorified in those sages of the East, that came from afar to adore Him, and were conducted by strange light; glorified in the second Elias of the world sent before Him to prepare His way; glorified in every of those Apostles whom it pleased Him to use as founders of His kingdom here; glorified in the angels, as in Michael; glorified in those happy souls that are already possessed of heaven." Thus it appears that our Lord and Saviour is in all the bright days of the Church, as the sun in heaven in all those of the year. His light shines reflected in them all. He goeth about unto the one end of His heavenly kingdom, and runneth about unto the other end of it again—from Christmas to Whitsuntide, and from Whitsuntide to Christmas again, and there is nothing hid from the heat and life which He gives.

Again, Christ is in all sorts of persons in His Church, as He was in His prophets of old, in their several ways. He is in kings, because they are the Lord's anointed, as He was: in the poor, because what is done to them, He reckons done to Him: in marriage, because it is a token of the mystical union betwixt Him and His Church: in the sickness and pain of His people, because they, like S. Paul, do thereby fill up what remains of the affliction of Christ in the flesh.

Lastly, and perhaps one ought to say above all,

Christ is in His Holy Sacraments; in Baptism, that we may be made members of Him, and truly and really put Him on: in the Holy Communion, because therein, as we are taught in the Catechism, those who are faithful, verily and indeed take and receive His Body and Blood. Now, Baptism is the root and ground of the Christian life, and the Eucharist, in this world at least, is its top and crown. From the root, therefore to the crown, from the beginning to the end, that may be said of our Lord in His kingdom, which the wise son of Sirach affirms of Almighty God in all His works; "[i] We may speak much, and yet come short: wherefore in sum, He is all."

Such is the doctrine taught us by the comparison, which the Church and the Scriptures teach us to make, between the sun in his tabernacle in heaven, and the eternal Word of God, Jesus Christ, in the tabernacle of that blessed Body, wherewith, as on this day, He shewed Himself first both to men and Angels, to save the one, and be glorified by the other. Such, I say, is the doctrine of Christmas Day: it is as it were a clear musical note, sounded at this blessed time, in harmony with which are to be all our praises of Almighty God, and all our holy services throughout the year. The doctrine is given in two words by the Apostle, where he says, concerning the Church, that in it "[k] Christ is *all* and *in* all." Christ is *in* every person and He is every person's *all*.

I will conclude with a few plain thoughts about our own duty and practice, suggested by these two most certain yet most mysterious and unspeakable truths.

[i] Ecclus. xliii. 27.

[k] Col. iii. 11.

First, if, according to our profession as Christians, we really regard the most holy Jesus as our *all*, surely we shall never wilfully miss an opportunity of coming to Him, of prevailing on Him to come more and more to us. I fear we are sometimes tempted to think, that, provided the great concern be, as we think, going on well with us; provided we belong as yet to Christ; we have no occasion to trouble ourselves about this or that Church ordinance, this or that mean of communion with Him: and so we permit ourselves to indulge our natural sloth, and miss many a holy prayer, and the meaning of many a wholesome lesson of the Bible, and fail of our part in many a good work; all of which a little trouble, a little self-denial, a little devout care, would have secured to us.

Thus we do, forgetting that Christ's treasure of mercies is infinite; that however near He is now to any of His saints, He may and will be infinitely nearer, when that saint shall have served Him longer and more faithfully. His promise, "[1] We will come unto him and make Our abode with him," never can come to an end; it remains to be still more accomplished, the more completely any one, using His grace, shall learn to love Him and keep His word. Surely it is a poor kind of faith, a meagre hope, a cold charity, when a man, forgetting all this, can find it in his heart to say, "I shall not attend such and such a holy service; I shall not communicate such a day, though I might; I shall not take any part in such and such a good work; for why? I do not think it necessary, I trust I am in a good and safe way

[1] S. John xiv. 23.

without it." We know not what we trifle with, what we throw away, when we permit ourselves to speak and act thus.

Much more, when we not only neglect opportunities of coming to Him Who is our all, but even drive Him away from us, otherwise being near; or rather, turn His gracious presence into condemnation. God give us grace to think of this, the next time we are tempted to unclean, malicious, covetous, or repining thoughts. Let us not only dread the present sin, but much more the affront to Him, in Whom we spiritually live, and move, and have all our Christian being. If we drive Him away, to whom shall we go to save us?

Taking now that other half of S. Paul's account how Christ is the Sun of His Church, viz. that He is not only all things—Light and Heat, and Life, and Comfort, to each particular person; but also that He is *in* all—there is no Christian who is not partaker of Him;—this will give us deep thoughts of our duty to our neighbour, as the other, of our services paid to Almighty God. It is a remarkable saying of S. Peter, "[m] Honour all men." Do not only deal kindly with them, but really respect and honour them. Why? Because they are made after the image of God. By the same rule, and more, the meanest Christian must be honoured because He bears Christ about within him: even as a certain holy man of old, Ignatius, the friend of S. Paul and S. Peter, told the Roman Emperor, when about to pass sentence upon him. The Emperor asked him, "What signifieth the title you are called by? and to whom belongs it?" "It belongs," replied the

[m] 1 S. Pet. ii. 17.

Saint, "to all who carry Jesus Christ in their bosoms." "Do you mean," inquired the Emperor, "that Person Who was crucified in the time of Pontius Pilate?" "Him," replied Ignatius, "I mean, Who nailed upon His Cross both the sins which I have committed, and the being that led me to commit them, and Who hath decreed that all spiritual craft and malice shall be put under the feet of them who carry Him in their bosoms." "Do you then," asked the Emperor, "carry a crucified Man within you?" Ignatius answered, "I do: for it is written, '[n] I will dwell within them, and I will walk among them.'" It was no special holiness of his own that this blessed Saint was speaking of; he would not so have praised himself: but he was speaking of that which is common to all Christians, did they but know their own happiness: Jesus Christ dwelling in them by His Holy Spirit.

We see then, that in honouring them we are honouring Him: loving them, we are loving Him: in going out of our way to serve them, we are making a little sacrifice to Him Who thought not His life too dear to be parted with on the Cross for our salvation. And the common saying, "For Christ's sake," is more exactly founded on truth than we perhaps have considered. For, indeed, Jesus Christ is in those who use it, whoever they are, and however unworthy, if they be Christian people: and we must reverence them, and do the best we can for them, not only for the sake of pity and kindness, but also for the sake of Christ abiding within them.

And let us also seriously consider, what a thing it

[n] 2 Cor. vii. 16.

must be, in any way to defile or corrupt the bodies and souls, in which our gracious Lord so vouchsafes to dwell.

May the good Spirit of God write in all our hearts high and true thoughts of our calling, as this holy day declares it to us; viz., that our Lord and Redeemer is truly present in every one of us, to be all in all, if we refuse Him not: that so, keeping Church Unity in this world, we may come to perfect union with Him in heaven!

And if it should please God to preserve our life through that year which will soon begin, may we so live during that year, that we may find ourselves next Christmas to have really made a step in that blessed journey!

I will end with a short Collect, which was formerly used in the Church of England at the morning Communion on Christmas Day:

"O God, Who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Thine only Son Jesus Christ: grant, that as we joyfully receive Him for our Redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold Him when He shall come to be our Judge: Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen."

SERMON III.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST'S BIRTH, AND OF OUR NEW BIRTH.

(CHRISTMAS DAY.)

Isa. lv. 8, 9.

"*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways, saith the Lord: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*"

When a person wakes on a Christmas morning, and turns his mind at once, as a thoughtful person naturally will, to the great and unutterable miracle of the day, it is somewhat of the same kind of thought as when we gaze earnestly on the deep heaven above us; and the longer we gaze, the more certainly we feel how far it reaches, how utterly and entirely beyond us; how we might go on for ever, and be more and more lost and swallowed up in the contemplation of it.

It should seem that the blue sky or firmament was on purpose so made, the light caused so to pass through it, and our eyes so formed, that as we look on it, or but think of it, spread above us, we may feel that we are in the midst of a Power and Wisdom which

we can by no means understand; which is at the same time close to us, and yet infinitely far above us. The Scripture encourages this thought in many places. Thus God is called, first in Job, and many times afterwards in the Prophets, He Who stretcheth out the Heavens like a curtain; "[a]Who sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers; Who stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." "The inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers;" surely that word speaks to every man's heart, expressing how little, and mean, and insignificant, we feel, when we look up to the unbounded sky, and think of ourselves, how little room we seem to take in God's vast and wonderful world.

This is an overpowering thought; but the Scripture tells us something else, which makes it a thought full of all consolation. The height of heaven represents to our very eyes, not only God's incomprehensible greatness and wisdom, but His infinite love also. For "[b]look how high the heaven is in comparison of the earth, so great is His mercy also toward them that fear Him: look how wide also the east is from the west, so far hath He set our sins from us." The space in which our eyesight loses itself, when we look up on a clear day, or when we look all around from a high place on some boundless prospect, is an appointed measure of God's love,—a token from Himself of His pardoning and life-giving favour, shewn to us as members of His Son. The Psalms repeat this over and over: "[c]Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens,

[a] Isa. xl. 22. Job ix. 8. [b] Ps. ciii. 11, 12. [c] Ib. xxxvi. 5.

and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." As if it were God's purpose, that in that portion of the Scriptures, which the rules of His Church should make most familiar to all, that is, in the Psalms, Christian children should learn from the beginning the right use of the things which they see around them, and should never want something to remind them of saving truth, since even so common a thing as the sky, which they cannot help seeing with their eyes, is made to them a kind of sacramental token of Infinite Power, Wisdom, and Love.

As in many other places of the prophet Isaiah, so here in the text, the Almighty commends to us this thought, that we should learn, from the very sight of the heaven above us, not to lose in our sense of God's mercy, the deep trembling awe and reverence, with which we ought to regard all His doings; not to dream that we understand them; nor to conclude that they fail, because we do not yet see the fruit of them: but to labour diligently in the ways of our duty, and for the rest to be silent before Him, and wait on Him with adoring patience. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Now this same lesson, which the very height of the heavens was intended to teach all mankind, seems to be brought before us Christians in a wonderful, unspeakable way, when we are called on to remember our Lord's Nativity. For what, in fact, was that Birth which took place to-day at Bethlehem, eighteen hundred and forty one years ago, and in remembrance

of which the whole Church has ever since kept this day holy? It is something so high and sacred that it seems almost presumption to speak of it: we have need first to pray, that we may be forgiven for speaking unworthily: however, let us speak of it, as we may, in the words of the Church. We believe that, as on this day, the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, having been conceived by the Holy Ghost and made Man, was born at Bethlehem of the Blessed Virgin Mary: that on this day God was manifested to men and angels in the Flesh, so declaring and making known the Eternal Father, in Whose Bosom He is, and Whom no man hath seen at any time. We believe that He Who was from the beginning, begotten from everlasting of the Father, condescended early this morning to have a beginning and birth of His own: that He, Who is God of God vouchsafed to be Man born of a woman: that He, Who is called Light of Light, prepared for Himself, as it were, a visible tabernacle, an undefiled human soul and body, wherein to dwell visibly for ever and ever: that the Infant Who was born in the stable and laid in the manger, is Very God of Very God, True Son of the Most High God, and Himself Truly God as His Father is: that, although in His human soul and body He is made and created, as the first Adam was by His own Almighty power, yet is He, as the Son of God, begotten not made: He was seen lying in the manger this morning, just born, weak and helpless as another infant might be; yet He was even then, and had been for ever and ever, in heaven with the Almighty Father;—He, that helpless Babe, wrapped

in swaddling clothes, as any child born yesterday, was the Lord and Creator of heaven and earth, of those who worshipped Him and of those who persecuted Him, of His Mother who had just borne Him, and of the Angels who were at hand to sing glory to Him. By Him all things were made, that are in heaven and that are in earth, "[d]whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by Him and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." This Great and Eternal God, pitying His creatures in their darkness and misery, and accomplishing His own eternal purpose from the beginning, descended and was Incarnate, so many months ago, when the Blessed Virgin was visited by the Angel Gabriel, and the Holy Ghost came upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her. "For us men and for our salvation He came down from Heaven, and was Incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man." And now, at the end of nine months, He made Himself visible to the world which He had created.

He began to shew Himself to Angels, as well as to men, as S. Paul tells us in several places: that "[e]to the principalities and powers in heavenly places was known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God;" and that "[f]these things the Angels desire to look into." And accordingly the Angels came, as all Christian children know, to sing their Christmas Hymn in the hearing of the shepherds.

This very thing by itself, God Incarnate, was the wonder of all wonders,—a matter surely as much

[d] Col. i. 16, 17. [e] Eph. iii. 10. [f] 1 S. Pet. i. 12.

above the thoughts and conjectures of man, as the heaven is higher than the earth: that the Creator should become a creature; that the Lord, most Holy and True, should join Himself to a sinful race, and become one of them, to deliver them from the evil consequences of their sin.

But even suppose the thought of God's becoming Man had entered into any man's heart, the circumstances of His coming into the world were far unlike what we should have imagined. We should have expected some such appearance as the Psalms and prophets sometimes speak of, in the clouds of heaven, in terrible Majesty: that He should "[g]bow the heavens, and come down;" that He should "touch the mountains, and they shall smoke;" or at least that He should enter into His Temple in glory, as the Ark of His Covenant had done of old. It would never have come into any of our minds to think of any thing so quiet, so poor, mean, and ordinary in outward appearance, as the Nativity of the Child Jesus at Bethlehem.

Consider, first, the quietness of this great event: how in the silence of the night, in the town of no great size nor wealth, in an out-house of an inn, the Great God came visibly among His creatures; as it had been prophesied concerning Him: "[h]the dew of His Birth was of the womb of the morning." As His Eternal Birth was in the secret and silence of God's nature, unspeakably everlasting, beyond all thought of the highest Angel, so His mysterious Birth at Bethlehem was a wonder in silence, and out of sight: none knew it, as far as we are told, but His Virgin

[g] Ps. cxliv. 5. [h] Ib. cx. 3.

Mother and the holy Joseph: every thing, it would seem, was ordered so as to make it most suitable for the God of Israel "that hideth Himself[i]."

Again, how poor and lowly was every thing around Him, Who was come down to bring us all the treasures of heaven! His Mother, the betrothed wife of a poor tradesman, who had not, as it seems, wherewith to find her a lodging; the place, a stable (in which according to ancient report, an ox and an ass were at that very time feeding); His cradle, a manger; His dress, such swaddling clothes as the children of the poor were commonly wrapt up in. The first persons who came to see Him, plain simple shepherds, of no account among men, either for their knowledge of the Scriptures or for their place and station, and qualifications in other respects. And if they said high things concerning Him, having heard them from the Angel, yet all was kept quiet, His Mother pondering them in her heart, but nothing coming of it all for many years. What talk there was of the wonder in that immediate neighbourhood very soon seems to have died away: and partly perhaps on this very account, the Angel bade Joseph return to Nazareth, that our Lord might grow up in quiet and obscurity, at a distance from those who might have heard of the wonders of His Birth.

The whole history, from beginning to end, is such as no one ever could have imagined: suited to His ways and thoughts, Who is far above out of our sight; but far unlike the ways and thoughts of mankind.

Imagine only what we should any of us have

[i] Isa. xlv. 15.

thought, had we been present in the place at that time. We should have had, each of us, no doubt, his own fancies and imaginations, not one agreeing with another: many would have hardly thought at all about it: some would just have pitied the Mother and Babe, suffering what to them would appear such pain and inconvenience, and there would have been an end; they would forget it in a few hours. Some few, perhaps, who knew more of the circumstances before, and were more considerate than others, might say to themselves, What manner of child shall this be? But none without especial revelation, such as the Blessed Mary had herself, could have lifed up his thoughts to the real truth—that this is the Eternal Son, the Word of the Father, made a little lower than the Angels for the suffering of death, the Desire of all nations, the second Adam, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the Saviour of the world.

Never, I suppose, since the world began, was there such a moment as that, to shew how unlike God's thoughts are to our thoughts, and God's ways to our ways; except, it may be, that more aweful, perhaps more surprising moment, in which the Holy Saviour, the God of heaven and earth, bowed His Head on the Cross and gave up the ghost, being in the place of a malefactor between two thieves. It is in vain trying to think worthily of it. But such thoughts as the following, we may humbly hope, are some of those which the Almighty meant should be in our minds when we remember it.

We may learn not to doubt that God's purposes, however to us unlikely, will be one way or another accomplished. He had declared, by His holy Pro-

phets, that at that time He would redeem the world, and that the redemption should begin from Bethlehem: and we see how He fulfilled it, in a way which no person present would ever for a moment have suspected. So He has declared that His Church shall last for ever, and shall finally prevail against all the kingdoms of the world; and that all shall work together for good to them that love God, and for the punishment of His enemies. This work is even now going on, and we are standing by, witnesses of it, though not knowing how: nay, we are every one of us working in it, either with or against Him. At present we cannot at all see how it will turn out; many things appear to us going on the contrary way to what they ought, to bring about the great purpose: many more, of which we cannot see how they should, in any respect, advance it. But let us only wait awhile, and we shall see how, by the most improbable means, He shall work out the counsel of His will.

And not only in the great concerns of the world and of the kingdom of God, but also in what relates to each of us particularly, we are to be quite sure that the Almighty has His own purpose concerning us, and that He is working around us and within us, even with the most ordinary things. We think it a very small matter, whether we perform such and such a task in its time, whether we resist or give way for once to such and such a common temptation; and all the while, who knows but in God's knowledge and purpose this small matter may be the beginning of great things, to us or to some other, through all eternity?

Recollect how it is in that, which the Scriptures

and the Prayer-book teach us to consider as having something more particularly to do with our Lord's Birth: recollect our own Baptism. The collect for Christmas-day teaches that our Lord's taking our nature upon Him, and His Birth on this day of a pure Virgin, answers, in some remarkable way, to our "being regenerate, and made His children by adoption and grace," that is, to our Baptism: for then, as the Baptism Service teaches, "we are regenerate and born anew of water and of the Holy Ghost;" and then, as the catechism teaches, "we are made children of God." As Christ at his Nativity shewed Himself in our human nature, so we at our new birth, S. Peter tells us, are "made partakers of His Divine nature." As He then became a child of Adam, so we now are made children of God. So great is the change wrought in Holy Baptism. Yet who that stood by, and judged by sight, not faith, would imagine there was any change at all? Who would lift up his heart to believe that a little water, and a few words spoken by Christ's minister, would make so much difference in a little child, were it not that the Scripture of God, interpreted by His Church, so distinctly teaches it? In this point then, also, we clearly see that our new birth answers to our Lord's Nativity; that is, in the matter of its being so very far unlike what any one would expect. Why should we doubt that so great an end as salvation may come of so small an outward beginning as the sprinkling of the holy baptismal water in the Three Holy Names? we, who know that our redemption, and that of the whole world, depended on a child in swaddling clothes, born in an inn stable and laid in

a manger? Surely, among the plain lessons which our Lord's Nativity teaches us, one of the plainest is, not to despise (what the Prophet calls) "[k] the day of small things:" that is, to be very exact about our duty even in the matters which may at first sight seem trifling; not knowing of how much consequence they may one day prove to that which is the greatest matter of all.

Think this well over, my brethren; think whether you yourselves, since this time last year, have not had more or less reason to be quite sure that God's ways and thoughts are far higher and deeper than ours, if it be only in His bringing great matters out of what seem to us very small beginnings. I wish, too many of us may not have to recollect this with bitter shame and remorse before Him Who reads their hearts, as having been guilty, within that time, of grievous sin owing to this very cause,—that they made light of small beginnings, and what they called trifling liberties, which they permitted themselves to take with God's commandments. Oh! if the unhappy lost souls could speak from the next world, or send a message, as that rich man in our Lord's parable wished to do, how certain we may be that they would warn us against the first trifling with the beginnings of mischief, the first scornful or idle neglect of what would be called little acts of goodness!

Let us think of these sad self-reproachings, before it is too late for ourselves; and let us endeavour steadily to contemplate the great wonder of this day, the Son of God born of a woman, and laid, like another child, in the manger at Bethlehem; with this prayer,

[k] Zech. iv. 10.

among others, that our eyes may be opened to understand, in some measure, God's gracious and gentle beginnings with ourselves. As He our Lord and Saviour Himself, from the very moment of His Birth as on this day, never ceased loving us, and preparing all good things for us; so never let us quite take off our thoughts from that, His unspeakable love, of which this day is the crown. It is such love as we never can fathom, never can come truly to understand; but we may and shall understand more and more, as we turn our minds towards it more earnestly. To watch and study Christ in His cradle is the very mystery of humility; and if of humility, then of love, peace, and joy. It is the very preparation, the beginning of eternal happiness; for in knowledge of Him standeth our eternal life, and such knowledge must begin from His lowliness. Jesus Himself is that little Child, like whom we must especially become, if we would be ever really fit for the Kingdom of Heaven.

SERMON IV.

THE SECRECY OF CHRIST'S COMING, AND OF HIS TRUE PEACE.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

PSALM lxxii. 6, 7.

"*He shall come down like the rain into a fleece of wool, even as the drops that water the earth. In His time shall the righteous flourish, yea and abundance of Peace so long as the moon endureth.*"

MANY portions of the Church of Christ use this seventy-second Psalm as one of the proper Psalms for Christmas Day: and no wonder, since in it, under the type of Solomon, the peaceful and happy kingdom of our Lord and Saviour is so wonderfully set forth. It seems to be such a prayer, as the Wise men, or the Shepherds, or the holy Joseph, Mary's husband, might offer up while they waited on our Saviour's cradle. Having heard from heaven of His high and unspeakable Birth, they might thus breathe out their pious wishes, as affectionate friends would for a new-born babe; or rather as loyal subjects welcoming the birth of the heir of some great and good king. And among the several blessings which the Psalmist would teach them to pray for and prophecy, not the least remarkable is the

manner of His coming, such as it is described in the text. "He shall come down like the rain into a fleece of wool," or as the Bible version has it, "like showers on the mown grass; as showers that water the earth." That is to say, He will come in great silence and gentleness, His descent will be as quiet and soft, and mild, as a rain or dew stealing down from heaven; known not at the time, not coming with observation, not marked by any sudden or open changes, such as the generality of men might take notice of, but rather making itself known afterwards by the gracious and blessed effects which it will bring about in due time: quite contrary to His second Coming, which will be as public and manifest as possible, and will even force itself on the notice of those, who are least willing to attend to it: it will be like a thunderstorm, enough to break the quietest slumber. But this first Coming in great humility was to be like rain on wool or on tender grass. Or, if we may use that kind of parable, it was like what we often experience in winter time, when a quiet thaw comes on after long frost and snow. If we look around us at this moment, we may perhaps see something like the spiritual condition of the world before the first Coming of our Blessed Lord. Every thing is frozen and bound up, and lies, as it were, in a dead sleep. There is no growth, no flowing of waters, no singing of birds, nor sound of young animals: just as in the dark heathen world all seemed spiritually dead: there was no growth in grace: generations came and passed away, and one was no nearer God than another had been. There was no communion with Him by

sacramental gift on His part, and holy hymns, taught by Him, on ours'; it was all cold and darkness and the shadow of death, all disquiet and dimness of anguish: except so far as in faint and scanty measure the true Light had given warning of itself, and had made its cheering rays be a little felt before. In such a condition did the world lie down to rest on the eve of our Lord's Incarnation: but in that night what a change took place! In that night the Most High God, Son of God, came down to be the Saviour of the world. He came "down like the rain into a fleece of wool, even as the drops that water the earth." The Holy Spirit descended on His Blessed Mother, who was one of the Jewish people, of that people which had been prefigured long ago by the fleece of Gideon, on which the dew came down silently in the night, when it was dry in the whole world besides. From that moment, the moment of our Lord's Incarnation, the great and mysterious change has been going on, which is to new-create the whole of this lost world, except those who obstinately refuse to be the better for it. Secretly and silently began that Communion of Saints: as sometimes in the night, after a great and long continued frost, a quiet thaw begins, no one knows how or when; the air grows gradually milder, the snow disappears, the brooks begin again to flow, and the birds to sing; and all begins so gently, and goes on so gradually, that we hardly know of it but by the comfort it brings.

Thus in some measure it was, when it pleased our Blessed Lord to take on Him our flesh, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin. His blessed

Mother had been guided by Providence, silently, perhaps unknown to herself, to the very place where the Prophets had said He should be born. There, in the middle of the night, in every circumstance of poverty and meanness; in a stable, where, as was reported of old, an ox and an ass were even then feeding, HE was born, for whom Saints and Angels had been waiting since the world began: "the Desire of all nations," the Light of the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel. And who were the chosen witnesses of this great wonder? A few shepherds, engaged in their regular employment, keeping watch over their flocks by night. They came and saw "[a] Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger," and they "[b] returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen:" and this was the beginning of the publication of the everlasting Gospel, which is now preached to every nation under heaven. No very long time afterwards, came certain Wise men from the East, guided in a way known only to themselves and the Almighty, by a silent Star appearing in such a quarter of the heavens, as to make them understand where the young Child was. They came and saw Him and worshipped Him, and returned into their own country: and that was the beginning of Christ's manifestation to the Gentiles. Whether, when they were at home, they spread abroad what they had seen, we know not: but certainly any knowledge which they taught of Him must have been very gently and quietly taught, must have worked its work silently, like dew upon

[a] S. Luke ii. 16. [b] Ib. 20.

the grass, secretly preparing men for the fulness of the Gospel bye and bye.

Thus did our Saviour come down, unobserved and in stillness: and such as His own beginnings on earth were, such also, in great measure, were the beginnings of His Church and kingdom. Twelve men, of as little consequence in a worldly sense as could be, were assembled in an upper room of the Temple of Jerusalem, praising and blessing God; and the Holy Spirit came down upon them, and opened the kingdom of Heaven to all believers. A devout centurion was praying in his house, and an Angel came to him in vision and bade him send for a Christian teacher; and so the door of faith was thrown open to the Gentiles. A certain eunuch was travelling homewards, and reading a chapter in Isaiah, and the Evangelist Philip joined him, and talked with him: and that was the beginning of the conversion of the great people of the Ethiopians, who are Christians to this day. And so, through all the history of God's Church, as far as we are able to trace it, God's will has almost always been, that His work should be done in a quiet, retiring way; a way little thought of at the time, either by those who were the chief workmen in it, or by others. Thus the kingdom of God has grown and spread and flourished and borne fruit, no person on earth knows how; as our Lord had given us to understand by that parable, in which He compares it to seed cast into the ground, and so left to spring and grow up, whilst the husbandman was doing something else.

Yet again, as the Birth of our Lord was thus in silence, and the growth of the outward kingdom of

Heaven has gone on in unseen unexpected ways; so also it has ever been with the kingdom of Heaven set up in every man's heart. The new birth of each Christian is like the Birth of Christ; as the collect for this day teaches, leading us from the mention of His Nativity, His being born of a pure Virgin, to our own Regeneration in Baptism, our becoming "God's children by adoption and grace." As our Lord's Birth at Bethlehem was silent, secret, mysterious, so is our new-birth, the spiritual grace of our Baptism. The world knoweth us not in the one, because it knew Him not in the other. The world, the mere fleshly eye, the judgement of persons unenlightened by faith, sees no difference in a young child before and after Holy Baptism. But neither did ordinary observers see any particular difference between the Babe Who was this day born at Bethlehem, and other young children of the same age. Only those to whom Angels appeared, or who had a star, to guide them appearing in heaven, could think at all worthily of that young Child: and only those who will listen and believe devoutly what God's Scriptures and His Church declare concerning Holy Baptism, will ever have right ideas of the unspeakable wonders therein wrought. The Holy Spirit coming silently down as the rain into a fleece of wool, or as the showers on the mown grass, does in that divine Sacrament so change the heart of those who worthily receive it, that it shall thenceforth be a proper soil for "holy desires, good counsels, and just works" to spring up; but this change is wrought in perfect silence. More especially in the case of infants, there is absolutely nothing at all, but God's word and our

faith, to give us any notion of it. Yet it so certainly takes place, that as you know the Church bids us all kneel down, the moment the child has been christened, and give God "thanks that it hath pleased Him to regenerate this infant by His Holy Spirit." And so *that* comes to pass, which the Psalmist in the text foretells as the consequence of our Lord's Incarnation and Birth. "In His time" i. e., in the times of His kingdom, the Gospel times, "shall the righteous flourish," there shall be an abundant crop (so to speak) of righteous souls growing up and budding and bearing fruit. For in truth every baptized infant is in God's sight a righteous soul; it is "made a member of Christ," it has "[c] put on Christ," and so partakes of His heavenly righteousness: it is "[d] washed, sanctified, justified, in the Name of our Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." This we must believe, taught as we are by the Church, that baptized infants, dying before they commit sin of their own, are undoubtedly saved. If they are saved, they must be righteous before God: and what righteousness can those little ones have, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ, bestowed on them by His free grace in their Baptism? As often as a child is christened, so often is this prophecy secretly fulfilled, that the righteous shall flourish and increase in Christ's kingdom. And whereas the Psalm goes on and mentions another blessing, viz., "abundance of peace, so long as the moon endures:" this also we may understand to be a secret and hidden blessing. For if we look for outward peace, freedom from enemies and vexations, surely we look for it vainly here in this world. In that sense Christ "[c] came not to

[c] Gal. iii. 27. [d] 1 Cor. vi. 11. [c] S. Matt. x. 34.

send peace, but a sword," and He taught His disciples positively, that in the world they must have tribulation, and that "[f]all who would live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." It is not then outward peace, which He engages to grant to His faithful ones in this text: yet it is something in this world, for it is promised to be "so long as the moon endureth," i.e. until the end of this world; for then as we know, the moon will cease to give her light. It remains that by this saying, "abundance of peace," David must have meant God's secret approbation and favour, and as an ordinary token, the inward, quiet peace of conscience, which belongs to obedient Christians, and to them only; that peace, of which S. John wrote, "[g]If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." But now this peace also is a mystery, one of God's secrets: and therefore another Apostle calls it, "[h]the peace of God, which passeth all understanding;" meaning, that it is beyond all knowledge and feeling, not only of other men, but of the persons themselves, to whom it is vouchsafed. For example, who can doubt that little children after Baptism are partakers of this peace of God? Yet surely we have no reason to think they are conscious of it; it may, in ten thousand ways that we know not of, be a blessing, nay, and a joy and consolation to them; it may keep, i. e., watch their hearts and minds as their parents or nurses watch their bodies in their cradles, and they may somehow be greatly the happier for it, without distinct assurance either of the one or the other. And as it is with young children, so it may be with

[f] 2 Tim. iii. 12. [g] 1 S. John iii. 21. [h] Phil. iv. 7.

all worthy members of Christ's kingdom, who, we know, must so nearly resemble those little ones in many respects. The peace and favour of their Redeemer may be with them, and may open to them infinite treasures of contentment and comfort, without their feeling exactly, whence it comes. They will know indeed by faith, that it must flow from "the God of all comfort," but they will not know it by feeling or sense. And thus very poor and ignorant persons, living in the fear of God, and serving Him obediently, though they could give no account of their faith in words, may partake of His peace, and live in the shadow of His Cross. As they have tried to do the work of righteousness, so He will not deny them their portion in the promised "[i] effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."

On the other hand, it is but too possible that persons very unlike these, persons who have quite thrown away the happy innocency which God gave them, when He received them into the number of the little ones of Jesus Christ, it is but too possible that fallen unworthy Christians may encourage themselves far too soon in imagining that they have this peace. For, say they, the Blood of Christ is all powerful; there is pardon for all who trust in it; and we trust in it: therefore we are pardoned. Thus many persons flatter themselves, and so go on in their sins, or at least in a very poor imperfect repentance; not constantly humbling themselves, not shunning worldly praise and pleasure, not checking themselves when they are apt to find fault; not

[i] Isa. xxxii. 17.

feeling as if they were far better off than they deserved. They quiet their own misgivings with a set of words which they have learned, about relying on our Lord's Atonement, and then fancy they have the peace of God, abundance of peace, such as passeth all understanding. They have no fear lest they should prove at last such as Moses in the Law describes, saying of some, "[k]It [may] come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart." May Almighty God deliver us from this snare! And to that end, may He grant us, what we have all great need to ask, a right understanding of the great mercy He shewed us, when He caused us to be baptized. Till we think more worthily of that blessing, we shall never think as we ought of our sin and danger; and our repentance, it must be feared, will be very poor and imperfect. But it surely *must* awaken, and alarm, and humble us, and cast us down at our Judge and Saviour's Feet, if we would truly bring home to our hearts, the lesson which the Church so earnestly teaches us to-day: That as Christ was now born once for all, so He was spiritually born, formed in each one of us, when we were baptized and made members of Him. So that if we throw away the grace of our Baptism, as undoubtedly we do by wilful disobedience, we make void the Blessing of Christmas Day, we reject the message of the Angels, and it had been better for us (O fearful power of sin!) that Christ our Saviour had never been born into the world.

[k] Deut. xxix. 19.

SERMON V.

THE WONDERS OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION AND OF OUR NEW CREATION IN HIM.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

Isa. ix. 6.

"*His Name shall be called Wonderful.*"

A Christian can scarcely hear this verse, without perceiving at once that it is a Christmas verse. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given:" the very words sound like the music of a Christmas carol: like the joy in some affectionate family, when it has pleased God to grant them an heir. Indeed all Christians all the world over, and in the unseen world too, make up one large and loving household, and we may well think of them on this highly favoured morning, how they all keep their Christmas together; the Angels and Saints in heaven, as well as we who desire to be penitents on earth; how the Angels repeat the salutation, with which they congratulated the shepherds that night by Bethlehem: "[a] Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour:" and how the whole Church in reply, with the Blessed Virgin and S. Joseph, and all the Holy Family, and with those shepherds, makes answer every year, and says, "Unto us a Child is born, unto

[a] S. Luke ii. 11.

us a Son is given." Unto us of mankind, not unto the Angels: for as the Apostle says, "[b] He took not on Him the nature of Angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham." The fallen Angels, as far as we know, having once fallen, were left to perish. He never became an Angel to redeem them, as He became a Man to redeem us. How can we ever love and thank Him enough?

"Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His Shoulder." "The government shall be upon His Shoulder." What is that? we know by another place in Isaiah, that in great houses the steward who bore the key, which was the token of trust and government in the house, bore it sometimes upon his shoulder: at the top, suppose, of a long sceptre or wand. For speaking of such an one, God says by the Prophet, "[c] The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder: he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open." So the government being on our Lord's Shoulder may mean that He should be Ruler and Head for ever in His Father's House and Kingdom. But what sort of a sceptre is it, which He carries on His Shoulder? What is the token and mark of His absolute dominion? It is the Cross, His own Cross, the bitter, the shameful, the accursed Cross. That is it whereby He reigns: that is the Rod of His Power. He bears it up the hill of Calvary, fainting for a while under its weight. Little do the bystanders think that it is in truth His glorious Banner, whereby He shall subdue the whole world, bruise Satan under His and our feet, and

[b] Heb. ii. 16. [c] Isa. xxii. 22.

deliver the souls which had been in long captivity under him. By enduring this weight of pain, which shall bow Him to the dust, He is to be the Saviour and King of the whole world.

No wonder it adds, "His Name shall be called Wonderful:" i.e. men and angels, every where, shall own Him to be most exceedingly wonderful; to all eternity they will desire to stoop down and lean attentively over His marvels, and search them out more narrowly. So it was to be, and so it is now coming to pass! Not that His proper name, the name by which He should be familiarly known, was to be the word Wonderful. We know it was not so. His name is Jesus Christ: but His name is called Wonderful in the same kind of way in which it is called Emmanuel; all believers own and know Him to be most Wonderful, as they own and know Him to be God with us. And this being the first of many aweful yet gracious names, by which our Lord and Saviour is described in the text, well may we meditate on it, this Christmas morning, with reverential fear and love. It is indeed the first feeling, which naturally takes up and fills the whole of our hearts, as we think earnestly on the mystery of Christmas Day: all is wonderful beyond all wonder.

All of us indeed, all the children of men, are wonderful both in their birth and in their growth: as the Psalmist teaches, using the very same word: "[d] I will give thanks unto Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well: my bones are not hid from Thee, though I be made secretly, and

[d] Ps. cxxxix. 13, 14, 15, 16.

fashioned beneath in the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect: and in Thy book were all my members written; which day by day were fashioned; when as yet there were none of them." He seems to speak but of the ordinary conception and growth of an unborn babe in the womb: and even that is to him an over-powering wonder: so that he cannot refrain from crying out, "How dear are Thy counsels unto me, O God! O how great is the sum of them!" That a little infant so formed should be capable of so great things: that this frail helpless body should have united with it an immortal soul, breathed into it by God Himself, and formed after His image: that he should be at one and the same time mortal and immortal, strong and weak, the breath of the Living God and the dust of the earth: all this is most exactly true; but the more we think on it the more wonderful it seems: so that the more considerate and knowing a man is, the more he is fain to cry out with the wisest of men: "[e]Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward?" And thou knowest not "[f]how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child." Thus wonderful is every infant!

Much more wonderful is it, when we think of the Holy Child Jesus. For in Him are united together not only Body and Soul, but much more awefully, God and Man. He is Emmanuel, God with us: God Himself, God the Son, the Second Person in the Most Holy and adorable Trinity, begotten of the Father before all worlds. He on this Christmas morning, about eighteen hundred and forty or

[e] Eccles. iii. 21. [f] Ib. xi. 5.

eighteen hundred and fifty years ago, began to shew Himself to His creatures as Man, having nine months before begun to be Man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Now think what a union this is: that the same person, at the same time should be the Most High God, yet a frail and feeble infant: Son of the Father, yet a child of Adam: God over all, yet one of the most helpless of all creatures: for such in truth is an infant just born: other animals, generally speaking, are far sooner able than man is, to do something for themselves. Imagine Him closed and shut up in the prison of the womb; imagine Him just released from it, in what utter feebleness, like other infants, He stretches out His Hands and Feet, and seems altogether at the mercy of those around Him: and yet this is the Great, the Universal King, Who holds the whole created world in the hollow of His Hand.

Think of Him just born, yet having lasted for ever and ever, for He is a Person, Begotten from Everlasting of the Father. He "[g] was in the Beginning with God", and "was God": yet behold He is only just now born: He is but a few hours old. Though we know the exact day, and almost the very hour of His Birth, yet, think as long as we please, though we should count backward till our words and senses fail, never should we come to the Beginning of the Son of God, for in truth He has no Beginning.

Then again, how certainly true, yet how utterly inconceivable is it, that this little Babe, here lying

[g] S. John 1. 2.

so forlorn in the manger, is the Great Creator of heaven and earth; Creator of Himself, and of His own Blessed Mother, whom, in thought, we see kneeling over Him. While she supports Him on her bosom, and feeds Him from it, He is in reality supporting her; in Him she lives and moves and has her being; for He is her Preserver as well as her Creator.

Moreover, while He is everywhere, Immense, Incomprehensible, filling heaven and earth, yet He is limited and imprisoned within the size of an ordinary new-born babe; He reaches not beyond the swaddling bands and the manger. And though He is Almighty, yet He has wrapped Himself in that coarse and rude clothing, making as though He could not stir Hand or Foot. He lies in the same humble posture as any other babe. He weeps for cold, pain, and hunger, as other babes do, all the while that He is "opening His Hand and filling all things living with plenteousness;" all the while that He is providing for the wants of the whole world. He is All-wise, nothing is hidden from Him; yet behold, He is content to seem as other infants, ignorant and simple; to grow slowly in wisdom and stature. He is owner and possessor and Lord of all things, yet is there no room for Him in the inn. He is King of the whole world, yet He submits to be ordered and taxed by Cæsar.

Thus wonderful, beyond word or thought, was our gracious Saviour at His Birth; and in His Death and departure, He was, if possible, even yet more wonderful. Remember the Cross, and Him Who hung upon it: the Cross, all pain and shame; the

pale and languid Body hanging on the nails which are driven violently through His Limbs; unable to stir Hand or Foot, as He had been in the manger; not, however, through the swaddling-bands which His Mother's nursing care had wrapped around Him, but through the cruel unpitying nails. And yet all the while that He is hanging there, and, afterwards, while He is lying in the cold grave, He was the Lord of Glory. His Almightiness and other Sovereign Perfections could not depart from Him even for a moment. He could not cease to be One God with the Father and the Holy Ghost, all through that lowest humiliation. Truly His Name must ever be called Wonderful.

Yet once more is He Wonderful—an unspeakable union of things that seem farthest from each other—in that Holy Sacrament, by which He, most of all, makes us partakers of Himself. Who could have thought it, that the Cup of Blessing which we bless, should be the Communion of the Blood of Christ, and the Bread which we break, the Communion of the Body of Christ? That is, that, upon the words of Prayer and Consecration, duly uttered, though by a sinful imperfect mortal, Christ our Lord should be truly present, so as that we coming to Him by faith and repentance, should truly receive His Body and Blood: yet is that Body all the while in heaven, truly sitting on the Right Hand of the Father. As He Himself hinted to S. Mary Magdalene, we touch Him the more, because He is ascended to His Father. Who is sufficient for these things? who can think worthily of them, or praise God worthily for them? Well, however, may we believe them, on the teaching

of the Holy Church, seeing they are but the carrying on of the same marvellous strange wonders, which we are called on to remember to-day. As to-day, more than eighteen hundred years ago, He lay weeping in the manger, yet all the while He was reigning in heaven, so now on this same day, He is present in the thousands of Communions, offered every where in His Church, yet is He sitting on the Father's Right Hand, there where He was exalted in the day of His glorious Ascension.

Thus is Christ's nature full of wonders: and to us His members, has He given to be full of wonders also. Is it not astonishing, that each little babe who is duly baptized here, should become thereby a real member of Christ, united to Him more closely than our limbs are united to us: that the laying on of hands, with prayer, should enable the person on whom they are laid, in himself nothing, a weak fallen man, to consecrate the Body and Blood of Christ and distribute the same to His people? Is it not most wonderful of all, that Almighty God should continue to bestow these and other like graces, for so long time as He does, even on those who are provoking Him by sin? O who can think or speak worthily of the condescension of this good Saviour, Who has gone on so many years with us, while we have so often offended Him to His Face. He has not quite withdrawn His Baptismal Blessing. His pure and holy Spirit has continued to shine within us, and is even now offering to forgive and heal us altogether, would we but accept His gracious offer in good earnest. Think, my brethren, what sort of places too many hearts of Christians are; how full, nearly

all their lives long, of vain, corrupt, worldly, self-pleasing thoughts. Think what envious, what greedy, what proud, what impious imaginations we have from time to time allowed to come in and make their abode there; what sort of a home was that, for the most holy and spotless Son of our Father in heaven? We are amazed at His deep humiliation, as He lies on the straw in the manger, between the ox and the ass: ought we not much more to be amazed, that He has continued with us so long? that He has not long ago finally forsaken hearts and minds, which have been so often and so easily thrown open to what He most hates? What agreement is there betwixt light and darkness? What concord between Christ and Belial! But we, alas! too often and too greedily, have preferred darkness to light, and Belial to Christ; we have done so as often as we have consented to any known sin; and yet He has not forsaken us. As He then lay quietly in the manger, so He abides with us yet, by His grace and providence, for all the unclean and evil company which we have profanely allowed to come in and dwell with Him. Surely among all the wonders of our Incarnate God, there is none more to be wondered at than this: that He should still bear in tender love with those who have used Him so ill; that as He has fed us, all our unworthy lives long, even unto this day, so if we will now come unto Him, really grieved and wearied, as well we may, for our sins, He will come nearer and nearer to us; will help our too tardy penitence; will enable us daily to do some little towards cleansing our corrupt hearts and bodies, and making them less unworthy for Him to

abide in. He will feed us with His own Body, He will give us drink out of His own Heart; and at last will work in us that final and most blessed wonder, that we shall become pure in heart, like unto Him, seeing Him as He is. His Saints, though by nature fallen, know already this work of His; and we, relapsed though we be, and ten thousand times fallen, yet we too in His good time shall know, if we henceforth but try to come to Him with a contrite heart.

SERMON VI.

THE RENEWAL OF OUR NATURE IN CHRIST.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

Job. xxxii. 25.

"His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth."

It is no very uncommon saying for aged persons to use, when they would describe a time or occasion of great joy, that "it almost makes them young again." It is a saying, which we all of us understand better, as we come to grow older. We feel more and more, that there is something in the early time of our childhood, very delightful, but now passed away, and not in our power to recall. Just as no after moment even of the sweetest summer day can compare with the morning prime, so there is a charm, a delight, in that morning of life, which soon passes away and can never be recovered. Only the fragrant remembrance of it returns upon us, whenever, by God's Providence, we are more than usually disposed towards simple and cheerful and truthful and child-like thoughts. Then in a manner we feel what the patriarch, Elihu, meant, when he set this down as one of the tokens of recovery from sickness; "His

flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth."

Now I suppose that there are circumstances about this time of Christmas, which would naturally call up this feeling, sometimes at least, and for a short while, in the minds of elderly people. Think of the sights and sounds, which were all around us last evening and this morning; the Christmas carols, sung in the darkness or the moonlight; the Christmas bells, ringing the very same peal, which perhaps we were used to listen to, as long as ever we can remember; the Christmas boughs decking the Church, and making it so different to the eye from all ordinary times; the peculiar joyous feeling with which families assemble, perhaps after long separations; the way in which all seem to feel, that it is right, for the time, to forget all one's cares and sorrows, and give oneself to innocent and thankful gladness. Thus, the holy and happy hours in which our Lord graciously permits us to celebrate His Sacred Birth, have power more or less, to call up youthful and childlike feelings in every heart which is able to feel them at all. When Christmas comes, men return to the days of their youth.

Now do not suppose this a mere accidental circumstance, a thing which has nothing to do with holiness and salvation. Nay, the very purpose, the mysterious purpose of the day was, that the old should become young, the worn and wearied and saddened and polluted souls should return to the pure and glad days of their childhood. What says the collect, which we have been offering up this morning? It is altogether taken up with the notion

of the old becoming young. You will see this clearly, if you examine the collect with any care. Like the collects in general, it consists of two parts. There is an address, or acknowledgement of good things received from God, and there is a petition for somewhat more, which we desire to receive of Him. What we have received is this: we have received His Son, His Only-begotten Son, given us to take our nature upon Him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; and we have received for our own persons a new and divine Birth; He has "regenerated us, and made us His children by adoption and grace." This is what we acknowledge to have received; and what we beg is, that we may be daily renewed by His Holy Spirit; that, so far as anything in our spiritual life has waxen old, has wasted and decayed, it may be made young, fresh, and lively again by the unspeakable, Almighty working of His Blessed Spirit. Thus, as I said, each part of the collect leads us to think of the old becoming young.

First, the peculiar heavenly secret and saving wonder of the day is this: God the Son, God Almighty, the Eternal, the Immortal, the Infinite, made Man; taking our whole nature, body and soul, upon Himself, so that it should be part of Him, and never more separated from Him. Thus the Old, He Who is from Everlasting, had a beginning, and became young: the Infinite and Incomprehensible did in a manner confine Himself; before Birth, to the womb of the Blessed Virgin; and after Birth, to those places where it pleased Him to be visible in person. He filled Heaven and earth, yet He was imprisoned in the womb. He is and was and will be for ever

in all places, upholding all things that are made by the word of His Power; yet there He lay in the manger, an Infant, of the size of other infants, and was no burden in the arms of the tender Virgin-Mother. Try your faith about Christmas in this way. Imagine what your thoughts would have been, had you been present with those shepherds, seeing "[a] Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in the manger." If, when you saw the Infant, you hid your face, as afraid to look upon God, that would have been the right faith. If you considered with yourself, "This is indeed He Who created the heaven and the earth; This is my Maker, and the Maker of all; He is come down in the latter day upon the earth; in my flesh, that is, in the flesh of man, I do now really see God: mine own eyes behold Him, and not another's for me:" I say, if you, coming with those shepherds, had had such thoughts as these, they were the right thoughts; and this is the true faith in Jesus Christ, "born of the Virgin Mary," that we believe Him to have been both old and young at the same moment: old, yea Eternal, according to that generation, whereby He was (as the Creed teaches) "Begotten of the Father before all worlds:" but young, not a day, not half a day old, in respect of His Conception and Birth.

Thus the Old was made young for our sakes, in token that we, being very old, should by His mercy be made young again. How is that? Our nature, the nature of every man woman and child within this corrupt world, is fallen and decayed; fallen into sin, decayed and wasted away from that glorious

[a] S. Luke 2, 16.

image in which it was at first created. It has become old, and needs renewing. It is called in Holy Scripture the old Adam; and is said to be corrupt with all deceitful lusts. To be cured, it must be made a new man, such as Adam and Eve in their first happy unbeguiled youth, created after God "[b]in righteousness and true holiness." This is what we need; without this we cannot be happy; and of this, Christ in the cradle, the Ancient of Days, an Infant of a few hours old, is the sure and gracious token. Behold Him in that narrow manger, wrapped in those rude swaddling-bands; behold Him with the eye of faith, and make thou no question, that He Who voluntarily stooped so low for thee, is able and willing to lift thee to the very highest. God made Man, God born of the Virgin, God in the swaddling bands, God in the manger, is the token and pledge of Man made Godlike, Man new-born of the Holy Ghost, Man clothed in the righteousness of God, Man exalted to the Throne of God.

Nor is Christ's Birth only the pledge and seal of our blessedness, but it is also the mean and way, whereby He graciously helps us to be made partakers of it. For it was God's gracious will, that, as we were lost by partaking of the tree of death, so we should be saved by partaking of the Tree of Life, that is, of Christ crucified for us. But He could not be crucified, if He had not a Body, through which those nails might pierce, and fasten it to the Wood. And therefore it was requisite that He should be born into the world, having our flesh, only without sin: for we see and know of our own

[b] Eph. 4, 24.

selves, that sin could not touch the Eternal and Holy One: sin could not touch that Man, Who is also Very God, to defile Him. He bare the burthen of it; but the pollution of it was infinitely far from Him. Thus His heavenly and undefiled Conception and Birth, were the needful preparation for His atoning Death. That most sacred Body and Soul, which was hidden in the womb, and revealed in the manger, being the very Sacrifice, which bye and bye He would offer on the Cross for us all; for all mankind; for all those, whom He is henceforth not ashamed to call brethren.

Thus, Christ's Birth is the mean as well as the token, the entire Sacrament, of the Redemption of our nature. But now, in order that each one of us in turn might himself be made partaker of this redemption, each one must be so changed in his sinful body and corrupt soul, as to be made partaker of Jesus Christ's life, and capable of being nourished by His Body and Blood. We must be changed; we must have a new Birth; and this also is signified and sealed to us by the Nativity of Jesus Christ. For as He, besides that Eternal Birth, which He had of the Father before all worlds, saw fit also to be born in time, of the seed of the woman, of Abraham and David, of fallen Adam and Eve, of sinful flesh, though Himself without sin; so we in Baptism are "regenerate, and made God's children by adoption and grace;" that is, in addition to the first birth, which we had of our sinful parents, and by which we are introduced to the life of this world, we are born at that moment with a second Birth, introducing us into the life of the other world;

"born of water and of the Holy Ghost;" truly born of the most Pure and Holy One, though still retaining for a while, to be overcome and mortified, the remains of our first sinful nature, both in body and soul. Thus our flesh becomes fresher than a child's; far fresher, purer, healthier, than a child of man's can else be, since the sin of Adam. Thus, we return to the days of our youth, to the days of the world's youth and childhood, the first days, the days of Paradise, before there was any poison of sin or death in the world. We are now acceptable to God in Christ, and our works too are pleasing and acceptable to Him, so long as we sincerely try to walk according to our high calling. Thus if we will, we may serve God "[c] without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life." If we will, we may be converted, and become as little children, leading our lives, from beginning to end, in entire dependence on our God and Saviour; as babes depend entirely on their parents: never easy nor happy away from Him, any more than infants are, away from their mothers and nurses: hearing and seeing much evil (it cannot, alas, be otherwise in this world), but not led away by it; not looking after it; not understanding it; because of their own innocency: feeling pain, of course, when it comes, but not looking on, not troubling ourselves about the morrow; not judging others, nor thinking evil of them, but full of trust and hope even in trouble-some times: soon forgiving, soon comforted, easily taught and corrected when wrong; content with a little, and glad to share it with others. This is

[c] S. Luke i. 74, 75.

part of the blessed character which Christ imprints upon us in Holy Baptism, where He gives us His Almighty Spirit, to make us partakers of Himself. Thus we might, all our lives long, be returning to the days of our youth; growing more and more childlike, improving in those divine graces of humility and meekness, of faith and love, of which the Holy Child Jesus began this day to set us the pattern.

All this we might have been, had we kept and cherished the good thing committed to us in Baptism; and whatever we are, however sadly we may have stained and torn our pure white nuptial garment, how deeply soever any of us have fallen from our first love, still we are to adore and bless God for the great work which He there wrought in us. The very beginning of our repentance and recovery must be, to confess with humbled and broken hearts, that He had done everything for us, that our ruin was entirely of ourselves. We must acknowledge, as we lie prostrate before Him, the truth of that Divine complaint, "[d] What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it. Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" This if we do with all our hearts, behold how, even to such as we are, the coming of Christmas is as light to men sitting in darkness. It is a pledge of forgiveness to the penitent, as well as of the first baptismal grace. Even to the most grievous sinners it offers the gift of the Holy Ghost, to renew and amend them. They are sick, desperately sick; they are given over; they

[d] Isa. v. 4.

lie at the point of death; nay, they may be so far gone, as to be rather like Lazarus, who had lain four days in the grave, and had begun to decay, than like any living person. Yet even from this miserable condition the voice and the touch of our Lord can raise them. If they will truly turn to Him, He offers, by an exceeding miracle of His grace, to make even *their* flesh "fresher than a child's," to bring back even them to the days of their youth. Only let them come to this Holy Child in earnest, not caring what it costs them, what they must endure, or how far they have to travel: they shall find Him with Mary His Mother, ready, as when they were innocent children, to accept them with their broken and contrite hearts. Let us only try, night and day, to give ourselves up indeed to Him; He will find a way, impossible as it seems, to make us what He would have us, and to bring us where we would be.

Well then may we all rejoice: young, old, middle aged; sick and well; sad and cheerful; saints and penitents; men and Angels. Well may all rejoice in the Birthday of Jesus Christ. Only the impenitent and unbelieving, to whom in truth is no real joy, either in heaven or in earth, they only, being as they are, are shut out from the great joy. To all others the word is spoken: "[e] Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth" in this new and never-fading youth, this freshness and innocency of heart, which the Holy Child offers to restore to thy fallen brethren and to thee, in Baptism and in Penitence. Rejoice for the

[e] Eccl. xi. 9.

strengthening and refreshing, which He even now offers you in His own Body and Blood. Rejoice, but not without trembling; for all depends upon your own perseverance: and for all these things, for your use of Christmas, as of all other good opportunities, the Almighty, be sure, will "bring you into judgement."

SERMON VII.

THE SHINING OF EACH CHRISTIAN SOUL.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

Isa. lx. 1.

"*Arise, shine.*"

The Prophet is here setting forth God's act of new-creation, of which the first act of the old creation was a type and shadow. For as we read in Genesis, that, when He would make the world, the first thing He did was to say, "[a] Let there be light, and there was light:" so here we read in Isaiah that, when He would new-create the world, bringing back the order and beauty and innocency which had been at first, it was as if He had said, "Arise, shine."

For "[b] God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." The Presence of God is Light, His absence is darkness. No wonder that when He shewed Himself present in that new and wonderful way, in the flesh and soul of that little Babe, Who, as on this day, was born of the Virgin Mary and laid in the manger of Bethlehem as it had been a cradle—no wonder that Christ's Birth should be compared to a light shining, as it is in various places of the service appointed by the Church for this day. E.g. in the 19th. Psalm,

[a] Gen. i. 3. [b] 1 S. John i. 5.

He is likened to the sun, which cometh forth as a Bridegroom out of His chamber: from the undefiled chamber of the Blessed Virgin's womb, wherein had been solemnized the marvellous union or marriage of God's Nature with man's in His Divine Person. And in the first lesson for the morning: "[c] The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." In the second lesson: the Glory, i.e. the glorious Light, of the Lord, shone round about the shepherds. In the Epistle, Christ is "the Brightness of the Father's glory." In the Gospel, "The Life that was in Christ was the Light of men;" it "shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not: . . . that was the True Light which lighteth every man which cometh into the world . . . and we beheld His glory, the glory, as of the Only-Begotten of the Father[d]." Of the evening Psalms, the eighty ninth says, "[e] Blessed is the people that can rejoice in Thee," or as in the Bible version "that know the joyful sound" of Christmas; "they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance." And again "[f] His seat is like as the sun before Me." And in the hundred and thirty second Psalm "[g] I have ordained a Lamp for Mine Anointed." Thus we see how the notion of our Lord being the true Light, and His Birth, the Light dawning on earth, appears and reappears in the services for Christmas Day: and we know accordingly, when we look at a Christmas picture, how full it is of light: how the little Babe lying in the

[c] Isa. ix. 2. [d] S. John i. 5, 9, 14. [e] Ps. lxxxix. 16.
[f] Ib. 35. [g] Ib. cxxxii. 18.

manger casts a glory all around Him, a Glory of His own; He Himself is the Fountain of it, and the Blessed Virgin Mary and S. Joseph and the other forms which are seen around Him, are seen only by that Light; without it, there would be nothing to see in them.

But it is the nature of light to communicate itself, and make other things shine. Things which it falls upon, are apt, as you know, either to reflect it and give it back, as a fair looking-glass, or a sheet of snow, gives back the light of the sun shining on it; or else they are transparent and it passes quite through them, as through a drop of water or pane of glass in a window. So Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, has vouchsafed to communicate His Light. He arose and shone, that His Church might arise and shine: and not only His whole Church, but also each individual Christian. To the whole Church and to each one of us severally, it was in effect proclaimed from heaven on the first Birthday of our Lord, and it is proclaimed anew every Christmas Eve, "Arise, shine." Let us see, how the words are spoken, and what Christmas thoughts we may, by God's blessing, draw out of them to do us good.

The prophet Isaiah in the text is no doubt addressing the Church, the Bride of Christ, bidding her arise and shine; as she did first at Jerusalem, when the Holy Spirit descended upon her, kindling her all-over with the glory of Jesus Christ; as He saith Himself, "[h] The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them." But we may also regard the words as spoken to each particular soul, as relating

[h] S. John xvii. 22.

to that moment when we are made members of Christ, for then our "light doth indeed come, and the glory of the Lord ariseth upon" us: then it is said unto us, "Arise out of the water, in which you have been spiritually buried with Jesus Christ, and shine henceforth with the light of that glory and innocency, which the gracious Spirit has now given you, by making you partaker of Christ. Arise and shine: shine on, through all the years which shall come after, during which your soul shall be kept apart from the body: and when the last of those years shall come, and the sun himself shall no more shine with this outward and visible light, yet to thee, saith the Lord, 'Shine on: arise from the dead, and shine on through all eternity.'" For this cause Baptism was of old time called "Illumination," and is so called in the Epistle to the Hebrews[i].

How did we arise in Baptism? We were, by our natural condition, dead in sin. We "were brought very low," lying buried in the mire and dirt of our own bad passions and habits. Of ourselves we could not arise; we were utterly helpless; as it is written, "[j] Without Me ye can do nothing." We were prostrate in a very low pit, "in a place of darkness and in the deep." Then as he who would help another, lending him a hand, out of the dungeon, must needs stoop into it himself, not minding the misery and noisome air of the place; so did the Most Holy and Merciful One stoop into our foul and dark prison, and effectually help us out, bearing, Himself, all the shame and misery of it; and at length arising out of it, took us up with Him or after Him into the free,

[i] Heb. vi. 4. [j] S. John xv. 5.

bright and fragrant air of His pure heavenly kingdom. "[k] We are risen with Christ;" the Truth has made us free; the yoke and burthen of our sins is broken from our off our neck; we have power and liberty, if we will, to lift up our heads and look after the things which are above: and not only to look after them, but to follow after them; to ascend after *Him*, with Whom we are risen; in heart and mind to ascend high above this world, and dwell with Him continually.

Thus, in Holy Baptism to every one of us, was the word graciously spoken, "Arise." So also was the other word, "Shine." In our first unregenerate condition we were in darkness, not at all seeing our way to heaven; very dimly and imperfectly seeing the difference between good and evil; "putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." But being made partakers of Jesus Christ, the true Light, we are permitted not only to see our way, but to drink-in the light ourselves, and fill and drench ourselves with it, as the moon is filled with the sun's light, and to shew it to others. We are like so many little candles lighted (if such a thing were possible) at the sun itself. And because we are both to arise and to shine, therefore it is said unto us, "[l] Let your light shine before men." Having been raised up, we are in men's sight: and being caused to shine, we are sure to be seen by them. It is not that we should seek to be praised by them, God forbid! but we are, without thinking of their judgement, to lead such lives, as may best encourage and help them to glorify God.

[k] Col. iii. 1. [l] S. Matt. v. 16.

Since then we are, one and all, in the number of those to whom God has said, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come;" let us take care that we *do* shine; that we keep our souls, like a clear mirror, free from the mists and stains of earth, which would otherwise dim the glorious image of the Son of God, offering Himself to be reflected in them continually. When Angels look down on the regenerate soul, they expect to see it all bright and shining with a purity, something like their own; disregarding what might kindle evil desire, and turning themselves, night and day, towards God, with reverential love. They expect to see it also shining with cheerfulness; enlightened evermore with a holy and religious joy; a joy in God, like that of the Blessed Virgin Mother, when she knelt beside the manger, earnestly beholding and adoring her new-born Babe. Also we may well believe that the holy Angels, who waited near Bethlehem on the first Christmas Day, and were so ready and eager with their songs of praise, and in instructing the shepherds where they might find the Babe: we may well believe that those Angels expect to find in us, the new-born of Christ, a certain obedient and dutiful alacrity, a quick and bright way of going on from one thing to another, earnestly seeking out and fulfilling all His Will. And this may be part of the meaning of the Holy Spirit, when He says to each of us by the Prophet, "Arise, shine:" as who should ask, "Are you not a Christian? be not then slothful and languid: arouse yourself: be up and doing in your Lord's service: and when you have done a little, some one or two things, do not stand gazing on it, but go on to the next thing;

stir thyself up continually, by devout and thankful meditation, to do more and more for Christ; this is the way to arise and shine in good earnest." Do your work swiftly and clearly, but as silently as possible: after the manner of rays of light, which come from the sun in silence, with inconceivable speed, straight to the point where God intends them to fall. Such should our work be; no noise, no disturbance, no loitering about other and meaner things.

In this other respect too, the Christian should resemble the morning light, that he should arise and shine more and more. "[m] The path of the just," says the wise man, "is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." The child's goodness is as it were a little spark lighted in Baptism: holy and clear, but faint by reason of its smallness. As the child grows, into a man, God expects his goodness also to grow, and throw its beams wider and wider. Only it must be always remembered, that both for the first gift of grace, and for its growth afterwards, we are wholly and only God's debtors; our light is altogether borrowed and reflected from His. As the Apostle asks, "[n] Who made thee to differ from another? or what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" Our goodness is all borrowed, all Christ's; none of it is properly our own; and for this very cause it may and ought to go on perpetually increasing; as there is no end to the water which may be drawn out of a deep unfathomable well. "[o] This

[m] Prov. iv. 18. [n] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [o] 2 Cor. xiii. 9.

also " saith S. Paul again, "I wish, even your perfection." i. e., he would have us go on to our lives' end, learning and practising more and more goodness from Him Whose life was to be our example, as His Death was our atoning Sacrifice. Do you not see, when children are learning to write, how they are used to set their minds and eyes on their copy, and form something as near like it as they can? We expect and hope to see them from time to time coming nearer to that copy. But neither they nor we expect, that they should ever (in their time of learning) quite come up to it. So and much more in following Christ's blessed example. A wise man will not labour at it the less, for knowing that it is far beyond him; that he never can hope to come up to it. *That* does not signify, either to his duty or to his reward; but it does signify very much that he should go through life improving; that so far from dying down and losing his baptismal brightness, which is the case, alas! too commonly, he should wax brighter and brighter as the years of his trial go on; purer, more joyful, more silently active in well-doing, at his Confirmation, than in times nearer his Baptism; shining again in all these respects with added light after his first Communion, and so on from each Communion afterwards. For such are "they that dwell in God's House," under His blessing, they will "[p] go on from strength to strength".

Now, how is this to be? How are we to grow brighter and brighter, except by constantly renewing our approaches to the first fountain of our original brightness; that is, to Jesus Christ? Even as those

[p] Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

who would keep up and increase a fire, still keep on throwing on more and more of the same kind of fuel, or as good, as that with which it was at first made up. Now, since our Lord is departed far away, and we cannot be baptized again, so as to renew and increase our communion with Him in that way, we might be at a loss what to do, in order thus to make our lamps burn brighter, had He not graciously ordained another Sacrament, for a special help to us in this very respect. He hath left us the Holy offering and feast of His own Body and Blood, which shall ever be, to those who receive it worthily, as a pure and living light, entering into them; and causing them to shine all over with a growing and increasing brightness, seen of Angels, but not always seen of themselves; because it is a hidden work, the work of the Holy Ghost, as we read, "[q] They are changed into the same Image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." For in the Sacrament, as in Him Who gave it, is Life, "and the Life is the Light of men."

Whoever then would arise and shine, as all Christians are commanded to do, his way is plain. He must become a worthy communicant. And if he be one already, then in order to arise higher and shine more brightly, he must become a worthier one. There is no way of perfection, that I know of, without worthy Communion; and worthy Communion duly practised, is sufficient. "[r] O taste and see," all you who have hitherto drawn back; and "taste and see" again, all you who have come already. Only take care that you come prepared: that you come

[q] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [r] Ps. xxxiv. 8.

reverently, in fear and trembling, in self-abasement and contrition of heart. The shepherds, had they not gone to Bethlehem on the bidding of the Angel, would have missed seeing what came to pass to-day. Had they gone irreverently, it had done them more harm than good. So if you would see your new-born Saviour, you must come to His Altar, for that is the true Bethlehem; but you must come worthily, else your light will be turned into darkness.

SERMON VIII.

WHAT CHRIST'S BIRTHDAY IS, AND HOW IT SHOULD BE KEPT.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

Isa. ix. 6.

"*Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.*"

A GREAT day for any family is the Birthday of a child, especially of a son, and most especially of an eldest son. Great rejoicings usually take place; great, I mean, according to the means of the family; there is much congratulation and sending of gifts, and if people have any religion, such an occasion calls out an unusual degree of thankfulness to Almighty God. We see this from end to end of the history of God's people in the Old Testament, but most of course in the Holy Family, to which especial and very wonderful promises had been made. Do not suppose, when you read, for example, how that Abraham made a great feast in the day that Isaac was weaned; how anxiously Rebekah, and, after her, Rachel, longed for the gift of children; what earnest congratulations were given to Ruth when she became a mother; do not suppose, that it was mere natural joy at being favoured with a very great

earthly comfort: there was a sacred mystery in their motherly longings and joys: they knew that One should be born of a woman, Who should bruise the old serpent's head, and in Whom all mankind should be blessed: and each one, in becoming a mother, had hope that this great Deliverer might in course of time proceed from her.

Thus it was, all along until the time of the Great Promise, which God had vouchsafed to Adam, drew near; and all these ancient hopes, all this succession of joyful birthdays, had their accomplishment in the Birthday of Jesus Christ: Who is the true Child, the true Son, of Whom all the former children of the Promise were shadows: the true Isaac, born to the Church of the Jews, when it had waxed old and feeble, like Sarah; the true Jacob, ordained from the womb to be Father of the Church, and in her to prevail against the unbelieving world, His kindred after the flesh: the true David, Who, being once on the Throne, God's word was given that the kingdom should be established for ever. Thus all the reasons, that ever could be given in any family or in any people for joy and gladness at the birth of a son and heir, were gathered, as it were, in one on this great day, the Birthday of Jesus Christ: and therefore He is greeted with such hymns of joy, as no infant born into the world ever was or could be besides: hymns of joy both in heaven and in earth: Angels teaching shepherds that holy Carol, which holy Church has taken up and taught us her children one by one: and may we not hope, that it will sound about our villages, on this blessed Night and Day, in every generation, until He come in His glorious

Majesty? If it please God, there shall never want a generation of Christian children, to make the Church glad with the yearly Christmas hymn, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men [a]."

But that, in its first beginning, was an Angel's hymn, the joyful thanksgiving of good spirits, delighting in our deliverance, though they had no need of it themselves. To-day we have also heard another Christmas hymn, provided by the Holy Ghost many years before the Holy Child was born: provided as a sort of Christmas carol, not for Angels but for men, and most particularly for one kingdom and one family; the kingdom of Judah, and the family of holy David. Hear how this carol, Isaiah's Christmas carol, begins, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." Mark the difference, my brethren, in the two expressions. The Child is *born*: the *Son* is given. For He has two Natures: Very God and Very Man. As Man, He is born. By a true Conception and Birth, He begins to be at a certain time, so many days, months, years ago; conceived and born of a woman, as other men are; only by the immediate Power of the Holy Ghost without any father on earth. But, as God, He had not then His Beginning,—of course not. As the Second Person in the Ever-blessed Trinity: He is, was, had been for ever and ever, "Begotten from everlasting of the Father." But, as God, He was then "given to us:" and therefore the Church, by the Prophet, goes on and says, "Unto us a Son is given:" He, Who is the Everlasting Son of the Most High is given

[a] S. Luke ii. 14.

to us; made a Son and a Child of ours. And who are *we*, to whom He is so born and given? In whose name is the Prophet speaking? The Holy Gospels tell us distinctly, in the two genealogies of Jesus Christ. He, our Emmanuel, God with us, was born and given in the first instance to the blessed Virgin Mary and to Joseph; the one, His mother by actual birth, the other, His father by the rule of the Jewish Law: through them He was born and given as a Child and Son to all the fathers, even unto Noah, the parent of all now living upon earth, and, further back again, unto Adam, the common root and head of all men, and the root, alas, and beginner of our sin and misery. To Adam and, through him again, to all mankind, this Child is born and given, for a new Root and Head, by Whom we may be changed, so as to be trees of the Lord, good trees, bearing fruit unto Life Eternal. For, indeed and in truth, ever since the wonderful Incarnation, God the Son has really and literally been akin to us, to every one of us, to every child and daughter of Adam. We have become, one and all, His kindred after the flesh: very remotely indeed, most of us, but still, truly His kindred: in such sort related to Him, that if the genealogies or registers had been all kept, it would be possible for each individual to find out exactly in what degree of relationship he himself stands to his Incarnate God.

Why do I point out this? Because, if we will consider it, I think it may help us to think more truly, with more godly fear and reverence, of our own place and standing before God, and among His creatures. "[b] Verily He took not on Him the nature

[b] Heb. ii. 6.

of Angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham." The Angels, so far as we know, never experienced such love as He hath shewn to us. He never made Himself one of them, to save those who have unhappily fallen. But He hath made Himself one of us; in such sort, that, as I said, we and every child of Adam are His blood-relations. O unspeakable honour! and no less unspeakable guilt, if we force Him by our sins finally to cut us off from Him. O unspeakable love and mercy! that He should have so given Himself to us, so caused Himself to be born of one of us, as that He might suffer and die for us, and be touched with a real and true sense of all our woe and misery: bearing all the burthen of our sin; though none of its guilt, not the smallest portion, could come near Him!

But again, the other genealogy of Jesus Christ, which we find in the beginning of S. Matthew's Gospel, counts up His forefathers not all the way back to Adam, but only as far as to Abraham the father of the faithful: and thereby seems to teach us, among other things, that to the faithful this Holy Child is born, and this blessed Son given, in an especial and particular sense, in which He is not born and given to the rest of Adam's children. Who are the faithful, that they should have such peculiar interest in Him? They are all such as really believe in Him, believe in Him with such a faith, as causes them to live in a way well-pleasing to Him. Whether or no they be children of Abraham after the flesh, if they be believers like Abraham, seeking to our Lord, as Abraham did, to be justified in His own appointed way; He receives them for His very own, and gives

Himself to them, as at this time, to be spiritually born within them. Therefore He declares Himself "[c] the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe;" and when, on a certain day, He was particularly reminded of the claims of His kindred after the flesh, He asked "Who is My mother? and who are My brethren[d]?" (thereby drawing particular attention to what He was about to say:) and then stretching forth His Hand towards His disciples, He said "Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother[e]." What is this but a most gracious and condescending promise, that, whereas by blood He is akin to all men, and by covenant and sacramentally akin to all Christians, He accounts Himself by extraordinary favour nearest of kin to good Christians, to those who love God best and serve Him most dutifully. To them Christ is born and given in a more blessed way than to any others.

Would we not wish, brethren, each one of us, to be partakers of Christ in this last and more excellent way? I trust that we do. For alas! what will it avail us that a Son, the Son of God, is born and given unto us, if we refuse to own Him? if we renounce Him, and keep Him at a distance? What good will His Birthday do us, if we spend it in pleasing ourselves, with little or no thought of Him? But now, if you will listen, I will try and set before you in a few plain words, the way to keep Christmas in earnest. For it must be kept in earnest, kept seriously, or it never can be a happy Christmas.

[c] 1 Tim. iv. 10. [d] S. Matt. xii. 48. [e] Ib. 49, 50.

First, since we are all members of a great and high Family, the highest of all Families in heaven and in earth; since, I say, we are all blood-relations of the Eldest Son and Co-equal Head of that Family, and are now to celebrate the Anniversary of His Birth, it becomes us to put away all fretfulness, all discontent, all murmuring against Him, all grudging against others, as if they stood too high and we too low in the family. For else how can we rejoice in earnest? And He will too plainly see, that we love Him not, if we shew ourselves fretful and grumbling when we ought to be rejoicing in Him.

In the next place, all the quarrels in the Family ought surely now to be made up: and as we are all, by birth of one blood, by Baptism of one holy Household, and both by our birth and by our Baptism, kinsmen and members of our Lord, and one of another, so we may be sure it is His Will, that this day's sun should not go down before we are of one heart and mind, forbearing and loving and doing good as becometh His disciples. His Table is even now spread for us. How can we approach it, if in heart we still keep apart from one another, through pride or any kind of bitterness? O that, we might, once for all, even on this joyful day, make a full end of all such unchristian ways! that, being reconciled every one to his brother, we might all draw near and unite ourselves in loving obedience to our Father in Heaven, by duly receiving His Son's Body and Blood! Great indeed would be the joy in Heaven: and great will the reward be, both in heaven and earth, of every one, how poor and simple soever, who shall do by God's grace what he can to bring

about so blessed a consummation. What is the reward, promised to such an one, on earth? It is even this: that both now and in each following Christmas, Christ will be spiritually born in that man's heart; the image and likeness of the Son of God will be formed in him more and more perfectly. The Angels, friends and servants of the Holy Family from the beginning, will look on that man with joy, acknowledging in him the growing resemblance to them and our common Master; even as attached servants in a family delight in remarking how like this or that child is to the head of the family. Nay, and those around us on earth, many of them, will also recognize the true disciples' likeness to their Lord: they will take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus: and so His Holy Name will be glorified and His blessed kingdom enlarged. Finally, and above all, the Great and Good Saviour Himself, our Incarnate and Crucified God, will love such contented, charitable, dutiful worshippers, with a love so perfect and so precious, that the purest warmest family affection, the love of parents, brethren, husbands, children, will be a mere shadow, a nothing, in comparison with it. He Himself has spoken the word: "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in Heaven, the same is My brother, and sister and mother."

SERMON IX.

THE ANGELS' CHRISTMAS HYMN.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

S. Luke ii. 14.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

I suppose there are scarce any words in the Bible better known than these are, except perhaps the Lord's Prayer itself. They are the regular Christmas words; the Angels brought them from heaven on the night when our Lord was born. No doubt they were remembered in the Holy Family: Mary kept all the things which happened, and pondered them in her heart: she would not, of course, forget so very remarkable a thing, so great a token of mercy, as the very hymn which God's Angels brought from heaven. No doubt, year by year, as the Birthday of the Holy Child came round, those blessed words were repeated, with wonder and thankfulness ever-increasing, by those among whom God the Son was abiding visible on earth.

As His glory became more and more manifest, their meaning would open itself more and more, till at last when the Blessed Comforter had come down, and the Kingdom of Heaven was fully come, every

Christian might know and understand them. Then the Church began to put them into her hymns: they were used especially as part of a morning hymn: every morning, to their devout and loving hearts, was as it were a Christmas morning: every time they saw the light of a new day, they reminded themselves by this hymn, of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, coming forth from His Mother's womb, as a Bridegroom out of His chamber, and of their own deliverance through Him from darkness and the shadow of death.

By and by the same hymn began to be used in the service for the Holy Communion, being that which the blessed Angels chanted on earth; as well as the other hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy," which is what they repeat without resting, day and night, around the throne of God. Both these hymns we are permitted to use in the office for that blessed Sacrament, because in that office we communicate with the whole exalted host of Angels, whether serving God in heaven, or waiting on us in earth.

But there is also another use, a very well-known use, which men make every year of this Christmas hymn of the Angels. We hear it all round us in the very air on Christmas Eve: the little children come singing it to our doors: God in this way, among others, ordaining to Himself praise out of the mouth of babes and sucklings.

The words being thus familiar, perhaps, to most of us, let us now set ourselves seriously to consider their meaning, that we may not go on like mere children, one Christmas after another, repeating them, and rejoicing to do so, but hardly knowing why.

"Glory," so the Angels began, "to God in the highest!" Why was the Birth of Christ "glory to God in the highest?" Besides other deep mysteries which there may be in that saying, God did thus begin to make known to the holy Angels, to those who serve Him in the highest, His manifold wisdom in respect of "[a] the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." For four thousand years the Angels had known how man, being made pure in God's image, had spoiled and forfeited that image, and had enslaved himself to sin: they had known also that God had promised with an oath, over and over, to redeem His poor fallen creatures from their sad captivity: they had been watching to see the gradual preparation for that great and eternal work: they had waited on it: it was their joy and glory to help it forward; they were ever desiring to lean down over it, and look closer into it; and that out of their overflowing, heavenly charity; the same charity, which causes them to rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, much more causing them one and all to sing together, and, as sons of God, to shout for joy to their heavenly Father, when they saw the great work actually begun, which was to be the spring of all repentance and pardon.

One of their number nine months before, had, announced to the blessed Virgin Mary, that the Son of God was preparing to take Himself a Body of her body, to be conceived in her sacred womb: and they had been waiting, as anxious and faithful guardians, when He should come forth as a Bridegroom out of that His chamber, and shew Himself, for the first

[a] Eph. iii. 11.

time since eternal ages, to the very eyes of His creatures, bodily and outwardly, as one of us. Since that time He appears to them, and will appear to all eternity, clothed, as it were, in that human nature, which He took of the blessed Virgin: they can never contemplate Him apart from that, which at His Incarnation He received from her.

And this is evermore His special glory amongst them, as any condescending act of a great and beloved king is his glory among his subjects: namely, that He is now Man as well as God: He hath lowered, abased, emptied Himself, so unspeakably, as to have taken our nature into His own, and in it to have suffered for us the worst of pain and shame, love taking on itself what sin deserved.

This is His glory, this ever will be His glory, in the highest. The Angels will never cease praising Him for it. And after His Resurrection began another set of voices, there in Heaven, to praise Him also. His glorified Saints, redeemed by His Blood, as they one by one are admitted there, take up also, one by one, their part in the Divine anthem, "[b]Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy Blood." Still the voices swell higher and higher, as the number of the Saints increases: but the choir will not be quite full, until the great Day when the dead in Christ, together with those which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together, and added to it. Thus is the Birth of Christ, more and more every year, "Glory to God in the highest."

It is also peace on Earth, peace between God and man, the blessed way to His favour, which is better

[b] Rev. v. 9.

than life. Many of us may know something of the heartfelt, extreme, unutterable delight, when parents, or brethren, or dear friends whom we depend upon, are reconciled to us after any kind of falling out: how the whole soul, before unquiet and restless, is restored to sweet assurance of safety and repose: how people say to themselves over and over, Come what will now, we have that which we most craved for: we have the heart which we thought we had lost: we know how that we are still dear to him, whom we feared we had affronted for ever. Like to this, only unspeakably more than this, is the sense of being reconciled to God, the knowledge that, how grievously soever we have fallen from Him, He still cares for us as our Father; and this blessing is solemnly renewed to us as often as Christmas comes round, in the very words of the Angel: "On earth, Peace."

As if it were said, "You children of men had rebelled against your God: He had turned to be your enemy; and had fought against you; but from this day forward He is your friend again. How should it be otherwise, since His dear Son is become one of you? God is now made Man: how, then, can He choose but love man? how can you doubt henceforth that you may be at peace with Him, since He has taken your nature to be part of Himself, to sanctify it here by doing and suffering all His adorable Will, and then to carry it up with Him to the highest heaven, and set it at His Father's Right Hand, far above all of us Angels, and every name that is named of created things?"

Again they sang, "on *Earth*, Peace:" on Earth,

where, ever since the fall, has been hardly any thing but confusion and misery. Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Jews and Gentiles, divided one against another: their languages confounded, that there might be no mutual understanding, and themselves bred up, even from their childhood, to hate and despise each his fellow. But now in that miserable and divided world shall be peace, Jew and Gentile, Greek and Barbarian, shall be one: rich and poor, master and slave, shall forget their jealousies: "[c]Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim:" "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;" "[d]nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." And no wonder! For in this Holy Child, Who is born unto them this day, they all, how far apart soever, are truly made one. Once make them members of Him, that is, Christians, and they are members also of all other Christians: one bread and one body: no more fit to vex and hurt one another, than the eye to do harm to the hand, or the hand to the foot. Thus is the Incarnation of the Son made "peace on Earth."

And it is also "good-will towards men;" not peace only, but grace; not forgiveness only, but every blessing, flows from it. There is nothing too good or too great to be expected, hoped, and prayed for, by those whom the Eternal Son owns for brethren, and the Eternal Father for children, and into whom the Eternal Spirit has entered, to join them as true members to the Son.

But as it is best to speak of God in His own

[c] Is. xi. 13. 6. [d] Ib. ii. 4.

words, so also of this our blessedness, which is wholly with and in God. Thus, then, an Apostle speaks of it: "[e] There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust." Partakers of the Divine Nature! What Angel could say more than that?

Too plain, alas! it is, that the outward face of God's kingdom is very far from seeming to answer to these wonderful and gracious words. Look which way we will, every year almost we seem to behold the holy Name more and more dishonoured, instead of "glory to God in the highest;" and instead of "peace on earth, good-will towards men," Christians more wilful in resolving to have each his own way, and to be divided one against another.

But what then? It is equally plain that the failure is all on our own part. "[f] He hath done all things well." He hath entirely fulfilled the work which His Father gave Him to do: His Father hath glorified Him with the promised glory, and He hath sent down the promised Comforter: His sound is gone out into all lands, and His Church, bearing His Word, unto the ends of the world: He hath done all; and His Saints, faithful and obedient Christians, know that He hath done it: they know it more and more by a blessed experience: and we, too, will hope in His Name, for they, His Saints, like it well: they are not shaken or staggered by the seeming power of evil in the world, or even in the Church, knowing as they do, His power for good in themselves: and

[e] 2 S. Pet. i. 4. [f] S. Mark vii. 37.

what have we to do, but strive to be like them, that we may be strong in their faith, and, while all around seems darkening, may yet have the Lord for a light unto us?

Well may we understand how the coming of our Lord should bring about all that was promised and more, considering Who He is that then came; no human, no angelic, but a Divine Person, God the Son, the Second in the adorable Trinity. I beseech you, my brethren, represent it earnestly to yourselves: fix your mind's eye upon it. This little helpless Babe, whom His Mother has just wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in the manger, is the God and Creator of that Mother, and of you and me, and of the highest Angel in heaven,—of all creatures, both visible and invisible. This Infant Who now lies outwardly unhonoured in a stable, shut out of the inn, as it may seem, through the poverty of His Mother, is the Owner of all things, the Prince of the kings of the earth. He Who now utters but the wailings of childhood, His voice shall before long pronounce the everlasting sentence on all souls of men. He hath now laid Himself so low, and will lay Himself lower, even in the grave and shadow of death, in order that that sentence may be, to you and me and all believers, if we reject it not, a word of blessing, not of reprobation.

Consider what a work it must be, for which He so comes into His own world, the renewing, namely, and final salvation of sinners: and consider as deeply as ever your heart can do it, what a thing it is to be called upon, as we all are, to labour, in a manner, with our Lord, to be humble instruments in His

Hand, for the accomplishment of that work, at least so far as our own souls are concerned. Consider what an intolerable burden, to answer at the last dreadful Day for having wrought against your Redeemer, and made void His miraculous mercy: and, on the other hand, what an unspeakable honour, to be thanked by Him, to have Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Beseech Him to impress upon you, and never to let you forget, the exceeding greatness of this your calling, which is, to be working out your own salvation, as a member of Him Who is the Most High God.

As His Birth was "Glory to God in the highest," see to it that you try to glorify Him in all things. Beware that, in meditating on His lowliness, you forget not His exceeding greatness. As you read of Him in the Bible, now at His Father's Right Hand, or sitting enthroned to judge men and Angels, now in the crib with the oxen, or hereafter stripped, scourged, and crucified with the thieves, never forget that it is one and the same Person, of Whom all these things are written, and that Person, God the Son.

Again, His Birthday was "Peace on Earth:" do you then strive from year to year to be freer from dislikes and jealousies, more brotherly in heart and behaviour, that you may keep it more worthily. Whether men will be at peace or no, yet do your best, and that without grudging, in order, if possible, to be at peace with them.

Lastly, the Birth of Christ was "good-will towards men:" it meant them nothing but good, and the very best of good. How nearly, then, are we concerned, not to work against it by putting evil in their way:

not to bring on ourselves the judgement of those, by whom one of these little ones shall perish!

Christ is really in us, my brethren, as many of us as have been baptized into Christ, and have not quite thrown away His blessing. Christ is within us by His Spirit: if we will, we may in every part of our doings shew forth, faintly yet truly, the likeness of His Incarnation and Birth; humbling ourselves; glorifying God; helping our brethren; and so turning the whole year into a happy and thankful Christmas.

SERMON X.

NO ROOM FOR HIM.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

S. LUKE ii. 7.

"*She brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling-clothes, and laid Him in a manger: because there was no room for them in the inn.*"

I SUPPOSE, there are not many texts in the Bible, with which Christians, from the highest to the lowest, from the very aged to the young child who can but just speak, are more familiar than they are with this. We learn more or less about our Lord's cradle almost as soon as we are out of our own cradles; and it takes such hold of most men's minds, however poor and simple they may be, that they never forget it. That one part of the Gospel history they know, even when the rest has quite slipped out of their minds.

Those, I say, who know least of our Lord's Life and Death, are apt to know about His Birth on Christmas Day: but many, I fear, have gone little further in their thoughts concerning it than this: how hard it was for the Blessed Mother, at such a time, to meet with no better accommodation; how wonderful, that the good and gracious Saviour, the

Son of God, should so come into the world. They have a sort of pity for the Mother, and they think it very wonderful in the Son, but they do not think deeply enough to perceive the greatness of the wonder; nor how much it has to do with their own eternal welfare; and so it passes away from their minds, it may be, till the next Christmas, when, if they live so long, they hear of it and wonder again.

If there be anyone here, who is conscious, that, either for want of knowing better, or for any other reason, he has hitherto heard to little purpose the Christmas history of the astonishing Birth of God's Son, I would entreat him now to listen attentively while I try to set before him some part of the deeper meaning of what happened on the first Christmas Day. To the outward sense, it is a simple history enough. We may easily fancy a small town, crowded with persons, rich, poor, and of middling rank, coming according to the Emperor's summons, to set down their names, and pay their acknowledgements. The whole place is full of bustle, as at some fair or market, every one hurrying, and managing to obtain the best and most convenient place for himself. In the midst of the confusion, there appear at the inn-door two very poor and lowly persons, wearied, as we may well suppose, for they had been a long journey, all the way from their home at Nazareth, eighty miles off at least: and the man, being a poor carpenter, has no means for travelling in comfort, and the woman, his espoused wife, is great with child, and drawing very near the time of her delivery. In this condition they come to the inn-door, as any other

persons might; they ask for a lodging, and they are told there is no room: the persons abiding there are unable or unwilling to receive them, or to provide for them; none, it may be, knows even that there are such persons wanting relief; and they have no great store of their own, to provide for themselves any other way. However, they are turned back from the inn, finding no room.

Now look at them well: consider who they really are, who fare so hardly. They are more than they seem to be, and infinitely greater. They are more than they seem to be: for besides Joseph and Mary, there is the unborn Babe in Mary's womb: and they are infinitely greater, for that Babe is the Almighty God, God the Son, the Second Person in the Holy and Adorable Trinity. A sad thing it was for those Bethlehem people when they came to find it out, to have shut out from their doors a maiden so pure and holy, in such extreme want, so weak from her condition, so near the dangerous time of travail, and so highly favoured moreover by the Most High, that an Angel had been sent to her with a special message from Heaven. Sad it was, and a great trial of her faith, that when she had been declared full of grace, and the Lord had pledged Himself to be more especially with her, and while she knew that the Child she was to bear should be a great and eternal King, she should find herself subject to all this trouble and discomfort. Sad it was, both for herself, and for the holy Joseph her espoused husband, who knew all the miraculous favours with which God had visited her. And when those who had declined receiving her, not perhaps meaning any harm, came to know

more of the truth, sorely must their hearts have smitten them for it. But how much more when it was revealed to them, Who that Babe is, to Whom they had ignorantly denied shelter and refuge, when being yet unborn He sought it at their doors! May we not imagine them looking at one another and saying, "Alas! what have we done? That Infant, for Whom we thought not of making room, was God our Saviour, God made Man; and His Mother whom we permitted to go away from our doors, having Him yet in her womb, was the Mother of God. What shall we do? The Most High asked entrance in at our door, and we declined granting it; we were altogether taken up otherwise; and now will He not refuse us, when we begin to knock at His door, at the door of Heaven? Will He not say, You would not know Me, and therefore I will not acknowledge you; you found no place for Me, and therefore I have no room for you?"

Thus, it may be, those Bethlehem people might begin to reason with themselves; and such might be their misgivings of mind, when the true dignity of that humble family was known; but what followed would greatly comfort them if they looked on it with believing hearts. I mean, that, instead of turning away from them altogether, the Blessed Mary with her betrothed husband, still looked for a lodging among them: and when there was no room in the inn, they found it in the stable: as if any wandering poor man with his family should come to any of our houses, and should be told, We have no room, or for other reasons we cannot let you into the house, but there is such and such an out-house,

where you may be for the night. So it was, that Christmas Eve. It was the Divine Babe's will to be born in such a place as that, and therefore He so ordered matters, that His parents should not come to the inn, till it was full, and that there should be no other place but that stable, where they should lodge. It was not chance, God forbid! It was the will of the unborn Infant Himself. For He it is Who ordereth all things in heaven and earth. He would be born in the city of David, because He was the Son of David, the King of Israel, and was to fulfil all the prophecies; He would not be born in royal state or comfort, as the Son of David might be expected to be, because He was to save us by suffering and humility. Therefore He will not have room in the inn, yet He will find Him a room in Bethlehem: and what a room! It was either a hovel, such as cattle are often fed in, the cold winds blowing through it, or it was a cave in the side of a hill, probably a chill damp place enough, but a sort of place, sometimes seen even now in that country, for sheltering beasts. There He lies; that is His royal palace: and in what company! An ox and an ass, it is generally believed, were under that roof at the same time. Such He will have to wait on Him, Who is the Prince of the kings of the earth, and the Lord of Angels and Archangels. For a bed of state, He chooses to Himself the manger or crib, out of which the cattle were accustomed to eat: and whereas the sons of kings and emperors were used to be wrapped in royal purple, as soon as they were born, He will be wrapped in ordinary swaddling-clothes, how mean and rude, no man can tell.

Now in every part of this, as I said, there is a great secret and mysterious wonder; and although there is no need perhaps to blame those Bethlehemites for not receiving the holy family: for we are not told that they could do better: yet I suppose we shall do well to take what happened to them as a kind of parable, a type and figure of Jesus Christ offering Himself to be born in our souls, and of our too common way of behaving to Him. As He came, unseen in His Mother's womb, to Bethlehem, His own city, on Christmas Eve, earnestly desiring to be born there, that He might do His Father's will, and bye and bye might die for us sinners; so He comes to us continually, earnestly desiring "to be formed," as S. Paul speaks[a], "in our souls;" to be spiritually and inwardly born in us. For Holy Scripture teaches us of three several Births, or kinds of Birth, of the Son of God: first His Eternal Birth, whereby He is begotten from everlasting of the Father: concerning which it is said in the Psalm, "[b] Thou art My Son: this day have I begotten Thee:" next, we read of His human Birth, as in the Gospel to-day, "She brought forth her first-born Son:" and lastly it mentions, as I said, a kind of inward invisible Birth, a forming, not of Christ personally, but of the image and likeness of Christ in our souls, by His Spirit dwelling in us: which S. Paul writing to the Colossians calls, "[c] Christ in you, the hope of glory:" and our Lord Himself discoursing of the spiritual grace of the Lord's Supper says, "[d] He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood dwelleth in Me

[a] Gal. iv. 19. [b] Ps. ii. 7. [c] Col. i. 27.
[d] S. John vi. 56.

and I in him." Now as He came that night to Bethlehem, desiring to be born *for* us all, so He cometh continually to each one of us desiring to be spiritually born *in* us all. He came to us at first in our Baptism, and we did not deny Him room then, because we could not. He was then happily new-born within us, if I may say so, His image, sadly spoiled by the Fall, did then begin to be newly formed, repaired and renewed in our hearts. From that time we might truly be said to carry Christ about with us, as His Mother carried Him about before He was born. How sad to think of the places and company we have sometimes taken Him into! and of the vile unworthy thoughts and fancies, which we have permitted to enter in, like impure and noisome beasts, where we might know Him to be, even in the sanctuary of our hearts! Yet still He comes to us; He has not cast us off; He is still offering to be born anew in us; to help us by His Spirit in repairing His own fallen and decayed image in our souls. All our lives long He has been seeking the best room there, as He sought a lodging in Bethlehem. Have we given it to Him? that is, have we assigned unto Him the chief place in our fancies, and our hearts? Have we *tried* and *prayed* to love Him above all? Nay, have we given Him any room at all? Have we ever seriously set it to ourselves for a rule, "I will *always* remember *death* and *judgement;* I will try and please God *in all* things?" I fear it is too true, as concerning the greater number of us, that, for some considerable part of our lives at least, we have not given Christ any real room,

any abiding place in our heart and conduct. He has drawn nigh every year: this year He has been and is drawing nigh, to keep His Christmas in our souls: and we have too often denied Him. He has stood at the door and knocked, and we have made, as if we were not at home. Why? Because our inn, our lodging place, this sinful heart of ours, was full of strange and to us more welcome guests. It may be, sinful lusts, shameful desires, had taken rooms there; and they love to be in the dark, they cannot bear the light of the Lord shining in and exposing their uncleanness. Or perhaps pride was our favoured guest, and we were always delighting ourselves with silent praise of our own doings, our ways and our management: and then we know, it was quite impossible for the lowly Jesus to come in: for He dwelleth "[e] with him," only "that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Or we have had our house full of covetousness and worldly thoughts: all our care has been about getting and keeping bodily provision and bodily comforts; money to be saved or gained: and so our Lord could not make Himself attended to, and we never thought of letting Him in, though He has been waiting daily behind the door. Or we have given way to a cross and angry temper; we have been incurably jealous, fretful, impatient: and how should Wisdom, that is Christ, "dwell in a malicious heart[f]?"

So it is, my brethren; for one reason or another, too many Christians have all their lives long, been

[e] Isa. lvii. 15.

[f] Wisd. i. 4.

turning this blessed Babe away from their doors. Yet has He not wanted on earth such abodes as He loveth; for there have ever been at hand, as on that day at Bethlehem, others, pure, peaceable, lowly-minded men, who have gladly received Him, and have spent their days in trying to perfect His image in their hearts. To them He has graciously resorted, as to that humble shed near the inn at Bethlehem, and there, in silence and unseen, except by a few heavenly Watchers, such as Mary and Joseph, from time to time He is spiritually and inwardly born. Yes, my brethren, wherever you see a good, plain, honest, humble believer, very simple perhaps, very ignorant, very little thought of or respected by any one in this world, yet sincerely loving his Saviour, and desiring to be saved by Him, wherever you see such an one humbly approaching to receive the Holy Supper of the Lord, while others who ought to know better turn coldly away; there you see part of the mysterious meaning of our Lord's being born in the manger, because there was no room for Him in the inn. You see it, perhaps, very near you: you see it in some one at your own doors, perhaps within your own house; perhaps in some one as dear to you as any in the whole world, or dearer. You see, it may be, those whom you love best, communicating worthily from time to time, and so having Christ continually formed and born anew in them, and His image more and more perfected; while you behave, as if it were all nothing to you. Christ is all in all to *them;* but you make as if you had no room in your heart for Him. And so you have gone

on, it may be, ten, twenty, fifty years, all your lives long, since you first knew about Christmas. O my brethren, how long shall it be so? Why should it be so any longer? Look up, listen; attend to what is going on. The world all around us is full of Advent tokens; of changes and chances, of wars and commotions, the signs of approaching judgement. The Church, equally all around us, is full of Christmas memorials, of psalms and prayers, sacraments and offerings, signs no less sure of Christ's never-failing mercy. There the Angels are yet singing; they were singing with us this very morning, if we could but have heard, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." There the shepherds, lowly and devout men, steady and dutiful, have come this Christmas, as in other Christmasses, to see the things which have come to pass in Bethlehem: and they have not been disappointed, they have seen it all by faith. There, not a few of the great and wise men of the world come bowing themselves down and bringing their gifts, as the Kings of the East, led by the Star, came to worship the Lord in Bethlehem: and there is not one of them, but would tell you, if you could ask him, that what he finds there is more than worth all his treasures. All these in their several ways are glorifying the new-born Christ, God made Man to die for us. And we? what are we doing? Are we not, too many of us, letting the time pass away, as if nothing particular had happened, as if we had no great work of our own to do? The very children in our streets reproach us, if we are careless and

easy about our souls, by their Christmas carols, as they sing them from door to door. Oh, let us change our ways, before we have quite thrown away another year, which when it is once gone can never, never be recalled! Behold, He Who found no room in the inn this morning, is now standing at the door of our hearts, and knocking. If we hear His voice and open the door, He will come in and abide with us: if we turn a deaf ear to Him, He will depart; and then what is to become of us?

SERMON XI.

THE WAY TO BETHLEHEM.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

S. Luke ii. 15.

"*Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*"

We heard in the Gospel, just now, the event which caused the shepherds who were keeping their flocks near Bethlehem to speak thus to one another on Christmas night. The Glory of the Lord had shone round about them, and was but just departed from before their eyes. The Angel had been delivering his message, the "good tidings of great joy;" and it was yet in a manner ringing in their ears. He had told them that in the place nigh at hand, the city of David, a Saviour was even now born, one who should be a Saviour to them, even Christ the Lord, Whom God's people had been so long waiting for. He had told them also the sign, by which that Saviour would be known: "Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger."

Of course, it seems no more than natural, that the shepherds should presently begin to say one to ano-

ther, "Let us go now and see this great thing." I dare say, you think we should all of us have done so in their place. And yet when we come to consider, something might be said to excuse their not going just at that time, had they been so minded. They had been watching all night, and might well be very tired. Had they not better go home first, and take some rest? And a day or two afterwards might be even more convenient to go and see what had come to pass. Besides, the Angel had not expressly ordered them to go; he had only said, If you do go, this is the sign to know Him by. There was abundance of excuse, surely, for any one of them to plead, who, from weariness or any other reason, was inclined not to go just then.

But these simple and dutiful shepherds made no such excuses. They said at once, "Let us go:" and they went at once. However tired they might be, and however strange the message of the Angel might sound to them (so very unlike every thing that they had ever heard or imagined) and whatever else they might have to do: they sought no excuse, but at once did according to the tenor of the message. They were not so undutiful as to go on minding nothing but their sheep, when the Most High God had sent them word that their Saviour was come, come so nearly within their reach. Behold them, then, these simple men,—now that the morning begins to dawn, and the ordinary light of the sun has taken place of that wonderful Light from the Glory of the Lord,—behold them on their way into the town to see this great sight, the very Saviour, for Whose coming they, with all God's faithful people,

had been longing and praying so long. They seek Him in Bethlehem; for it was meet that the Son of David should be born in the City of David; and the old Prophets had taught them so much. But which way in Bethlehem are they to turn? How are they to know, to what *house* to direct their steps? See, they pass by all the grand and seemly habitations there; they do not look for any dwelling house, where they should stop: and which way do they turn? The providence of God directs them to a poor cowhouse, or shed, a mere out-house, not at all intended or prepared for the lodging of anything but cattle: some think it was a cave in the side of a hill, perhaps the very one which is even now shewn at Bethlehem as the actual place of Christ's Birth. In that, or some such place, the shepherds find Him: and when they come into the room, what is it which they see? First, a poor simple young woman, fresh from the birth of her first-born Son: Whom yet she had been enabled to bring forth, without that pain and weakness, with which sinful men are born into the world, ever since Eve brought on herself and her daughters "the great pain and peril of childbirth." I say, from this pain and peril the Blessed Virgin seems to have been free: as we read that she was herself able to wrap her Infant in His swaddling clothes, and lay Him in the manger. Her travail was free from pain, because in What she had conceived there was no touch of sin. This blessed woman, then, watching over the wonderful and Divine Babe and her espoused husband S. Joseph by her—this was what the shepherds saw when they came into the out-house. There might be also beasts

feeding; but the Virgin, S. Joseph, and the Infant, were the only persons visible. The Angels of God might be around, worshipping Christ; as it is written, "When He bringeth in the First-Begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the Angels of God worship Him [a]." But the shepherds could not see them at that time; they only saw an old man, a young woman, and a Babe. What met their eyes was nothing so very extraordinary. Why did they think so much of it? The Angels had told them, when and how they should find the Babe, and what manner of Child He was in deed and in truth. They remembered the Angel's words; they saw it was as the Angel had said; and so without minding trouble, or making difficulties, or going after ways of their own, they simply trusted in Christ and encouraged others to do the same. For it is written, "When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all they that heard it, wondered at those things, which had been told them by the shepherds." All *wondered;* it is not said that they all came, or all believed. *That* is a serious thing for all to consider.

For we too, my brethren, every one of us, have been told this same good news by our shepherds and our Angels. We have read or heard all these things in the Gospel; we have been reminded of them every Christmas; and besides, God has sent to us one by one His shepherds, the visible ministers of His Word and Sacraments; and His Angels, the unseen ministers of His gracious Providence, to preach to us the very same Gospel, the very same good news, which rung

[a] Heb. i. 6.

through the air on that first Christmas night, and which the shepherds, coming to Bethlehem, found to be all true. Whoever we are, whatever our condition in life, young or old, rich or poor, sick or well, learned or unlearned; God has come to us by day or by night, in our several works and ways of life, and has bidden us to go to Bethlehem, to go where His Son may be found. The good tidings of great joy have not been hidden from us; we have heard them from our youth up, if we would but attend to them; they have sounded in the wintry night air every Christmas Eve, as they did last night, in the carols of Christian children. We have not been forsaken and left, as those who never heard of Christ; the mere coming of Christmas yearly, however little we may have pondered on it, is enough to shew that we are not as the heathen. God has told us as He told the shepherds, where His Son may be found; Who that Son is; and why He is come down among us. He is born, the Angel tells us, "in the City of David," i.e. in the Holy City, in the Church of God, the Family of the Most High; there He may be found. And who is He? He is "Christ the Lord;" God the Son, made Man that He may suffer for us and save us. There is the Great King of Heaven and earth, the Creator of Angels and men, The High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, in the manger for want of a cradle, wrapped in ordinary swaddling clothes, such as a poor woman would use for that purpose: His cries are heard as those of another child, He needs attendance and nursing as all other infants do. And why is He there? Why is the King of Heaven lying thus low, between the

ox and the ass? Why has He thus compassed Himself about with all our sadnesses and infirmities? Why, but because He loved us, and could not bear that we should perish in our sins. Why, but because He knew that according to His and His Father's everlasting law we could not be forgiven without a sufficient Sacrifice, and no one of us, nor all of us together, could possibly offer such a sacrifice; and therefore He, the Ever-blessed Son, came and was made one of us, taking the Body which the Holy Ghost had prepared for Him in the womb of the Blessed Virgin: and so there was, what else might not be, a Man able to redeem mankind; a Child of Adam, capable of becoming a worthy Sacrifice for all Adam's children. Again, there was also, what else might not be, a Divine Person, one of the Persons of the Godhead, capable of being actually touched with a feeling of our infirmities; tempted in all points like as we are; actually and really feeling for us and with us in every thing that is not sin. These two things we obtain by our Lord's Incarnation; a perfect Sacrifice, and an Intercessor and Judge Who can truly feel for us, because He is truly our brother. And lastly, there was, by our Lord's Incarnation, what else might not be, a way for us sons of men to be truly and really sons of God, "Partakers," as saith the Apostle," of the Divine Nature." What could Infinite Love Itself do more for us? It is all Love, from beginning to end: Love, which accounts nothing at all too good for the beloved.

This is what we are invited to, when it is said, "Let us go even unto Bethlehem." Can you refuse

such an invitation? But you will say, perhaps, "We *do* go there; here we are, expressly to keep Christmas; we do not forget this holy season; we sing our carols, we wish one another good wishes, we rejoice in the many memorials of the happy time which are around us." Well, my brethren, I am glad that you should know even so much of Christmas as this. It is a better chance for you to come to a good mind, than as if all times were alike to you. But still I wish to say one thing to you; and the rather, because I believe there are some who make a point of being here to-day, who hardly come at all on any other day in the year, except perhaps it were Good Friday. And what I wish to say is this; How can any of you be content with merely believing that Christmas is a good time and just enjoying it when it comes? What if the shepherds in the Gospel had merely gone and seen the Child, and thought no more about it? Would it not have been strangely dull and insensible of them? Could you expect any real good in such people?

But you would tell me, perhaps, if I could come close to you and ask you, that you do not know how to answer the Lord's invitation: how to find out Jesus Christ, and, having found, to keep Him. Well then, attend to the signs which the Angels gave. First, you must go to Bethlehem. What is Bethlehem? the House of Bread, for that is the proper meaning of the name Bethlehem. And what can "the House of Bread" mean, but the place where our Lord giveth us the true and real Bread from Heaven? The true Bread from Heaven is the Body of Jesus Christ given us in His Holy

Sacrament. Our Bethlehem then, the place to which our Lord invites us at Christmas, is the place where Holy Communion is to be had by us. Our Bethlehem is the Church; not merely this building, God's bountiful gift to help us in such holy purposes; but, in speaking of the Church, I now mean the whole way and Kingdom of God as set forth in Holy Scripture, and seen in the practices of His faithful people from the beginning. When Christians are told to go to Bethlehem and see the things which are come to pass, it means that they should resort, not to their parish Church only, but to good books, to friends who seem to be leading good lives in obedience to the Church; and especially (in many cases) to their priests, the persons particularly set over them, by God's providence, in the Lord. Going to Bethlehem to find God Incarnate is in fact going to His Altar-Table to partake of Him in Holy Communion: and this you cannot do as you ought, without seeking help towards it, as you best may, in Holy Scripture, and other good books, in the counsel of religious friends, and the direction of God's priests. As the shepherds went to Bethlehem by direction of the Angels, so the priests are a sort of Angels, i.e. heavenly messengers, to tell you of all these things: what God has done for you; where He may be found; how you may know Him when you find Him. They are to instruct you in all this, and besides, and very particularly, they are to set you a pattern how to praise God for it; even as the Angels having directed the shepherds to the hut and manger at Bethlehem, broke out into their Hymn of Glory, the same which we always use in the Com-

munion Service. By their advice and example, you will find the way to the true Bethlehem: it is one chief part of their work to instruct and prepare you for the Blessed Sacrament. And when you are got to Bethlehem, what shall you find? You will find Him a little Child: Him, the Maker and Upholder of Heaven and earth, Whom all the Angels worship: Him you will find as a little helpless Child: and He calls upon you to be converted, and to become like Him in His Infancy; else, He says, there is no chance of your entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. Now surely, my brethren, there is not any one of us, who can pretend that he has himself come up to this our Master's well-known and earnest recommendation: there is not one of us that can flatter himself that he is yet in spirit throughly converted; changed, and become such as a little child, such as the Holy Child Jesus Himself. This then you must study, to become in earnest lowly and humble; this is spiritually coming to your Lord's own Bethlehem.

Next, when the shepherds came to our Lord on the first Christmas Day, they found Him, as you know, waited on by His Blessed Virgin-Mother. She indeed was seemingly the first person, whom they saw in the holy household. They came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph. Where purity and chastity are, and fatherly goodness, there, you may be sure, is Christ. Next, they found Him wrapped in swaddling-clothes, His limbs kept in great confinement—for a token that He refused for Himself all earthly and carnal liberty. It was no object with Him, neither must it be an object with us, to be left free to do as we please—rather as He

said on coming into the world so ought we always to be saying in our hearts, Put it into our hearts, "[b]to do Thy will, O God." Finally, if Christ was found in a manger, poor and lowly, and among the poorest and lowliest; you see at once how it should be with us. We ought, in very deed, to be ashamed of our many comforts; in very deed we ought. We are not perhaps called upon to give them up, but surely they ought to make us afraid lest we have our good things in this life. When you have thus visited Christ's manger with the shepherds, and have learned these three lessons—Self-denial, from the Manger, Purity from the Blessed-Mother, Humility from His being a Child—then may you come to Bethlehem indeed: then will our Lord presently welcome you as a worthy communicant, and the good Christmas-time will have done for you the work which He intended.

[b] Ps. xl. 8.

SERMON XII.

CHRISTMAS JOYS, TO BE PONDERED, NOT TO PASS AWAY.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

S. Luke ii. 19.

"But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."

Times of great joy, no less than times of great sorrow, are very especially times of trial. They go deep down into our hearts, and whether we consider it or no, they bring out before God and His holy Angels, and also before the good and wise among our brethren, what kind of thoughts and tempers we are then cherishing in secret. Christmas,—every Christmas as it comes—is a time of trial to every one of us. In what way, we shall perhaps with God's blessing better understand, if we consider what Holy Scripture tells us of the several ways, in which several different persons received the good news of our Lord's Birth on that first Christmas Day. The Shepherds, we know, who were the earliest of the sons of men to know of this wonderful Birth—they received it with all religious obedience—went, as they were invited, to Bethlehem; and that, without loss of time; and offered most heartily their tribute of praise and

thanksgiving for the wonderful and gracious things, which they had heard and seen. Nothing could be better, if they persevered in that good way: but whether they did or no, we are not told.

But the next thing we are told is, how that all who heard it "wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." They just wondered at it, and no more: so far as we are told. The vision of Angels, the hymn of Peace and Glory, the Babe in the manger, the holy and heavenly behaviour of the Blessed Virgin and S. Joseph, was something for them to be surprised at, to talk about, to make their guesses and conjectures upon;—and so it passed away.

After a time came another company of strangers, the first-fruits of the Gentile world, as the shepherds had been of the race of Israel—you know whom I mean—the Wise men who had seen His Star in the East and came to worship Him. And these were as dutiful and obedient as the shepherds, and that under a far severer trial of their faith; having had to start from a great distance, and that from among heathens who knew not the Lord, and to do for a time without their guiding star;—they both persevered at the time, and also—what we are not told of the shepherds—they spent their whole life after in our Lord's service.

And they also, the Wise men, spread to others at the time the knowledge they had gained. Herod through them, heard of Him Who was born King of the Jews, but not with innocent wonder, as those who heard it from the shepherds; the thought in his wicked heart presently was, "How can I do away

with this Child, born, as it seems, to disturb my crown?" He was like those miserable Christians, who, as often as they are told of their Saviour and reproved in His Name, only take occasion to crucify Him afresh by their sins.

There can be no doubt, my brethren, with which of these we should every one of us wish to take our portion, were Almighty God to give us our choice. We should not desire to approach Christ's cradle in mere wonder, as did those who heard from the shepherds; much less in loathing and unbelief, like wicked Herod—God forbid! We would fain, if not too unworthy, receive the good news, as did the Wise and holy men from the East, or at least as the simple believing obedient shepherds of Bethlehem. But if we look well in at the door of that holy stable in Bethlehem, and watch what is going on there, we shall see a yet more perfect and blessed example than either of these; yet one which by the good grace of God the meanest of us may set before him, and try to copy. We shall see the blessed Virgin Mother not wondering only, but adoring; not adoring only for the time, but laying up in her memory and purposing to keep there, all the great unspeakable mercies with which the Almighty was visiting her: keeping them and pondering them in her heart, meditating upon them, giving herself wholly to them: putting them together, and humbly praying and striving to understand and feel, every day, more and more perfectly, what use He intended her to make of them. O wonderful thought, and almost beyond imagination! She is the Mother of God, she was bearing God in her arms. The most

High God, the Creator of her and of all, did really and truly vouchsafe to be nourished from her bosom, and waited on by her, with all those tender cares which it is a mother's delight to render to her new-born babe. The heavens and the highest Angels in heaven stand astonished, and come down among men, desiring to look into these things; and *that* happens, which never, (that we are told) has happened before or since; the Choir of the blessed Spirits is not only seen but heard by sinful mortals singing praises to God on earth, "Glory to God in the highest." Such a thing, I say, Holy Scripture tells us not of at any time besides. For the Hymn of the Seraphs, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come," which was once heard by the Prophet Isaiah[a], and once again by the Apostle S. John[b], was not sung on earth but in heaven. We may truly say then, and it may help to make us feel that a Christmas carol is very far indeed from being a mere lovely song; that no one should join in it without trying to be really devout; we may truly say, that the only song which the Angels ever came down to sing on earth was just a Christmas carol. This world has now lasted, according to the most probable calculation, about five thousand eight hundred and sixty years, which will make I believe, six millions and a half of days; and in all those days this has been the single and only one, on which the heavenly host have been heard on earth praising God in company. They sang indeed on the day of the first creation, as we read in the Book of Job: "When God laid the foundations of the earth,"

[a] Isa. vi. 3. [b] Rev. iv. 8.

then "The morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy [c]." The Angels sang at that time, but there was not as yet any man on earth to hear it. But the shepherds were permitted to hear them this second time, when they sang in honour of the new, the Spiritual creation; a greater work by far than the first. For that which began to appear to the world this day, the Precious Body and perfect Soul of Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, is as we are taught in Holy Scripture more than all the worlds put together, seeing it is He by Whom all the worlds were made. Therefore He is called in the Book of Revelation, "The Beginning of the creation of God [d];" and in the Epistle to the Colossians, "The First-born of every creature [e]:" not that in point of time His Body and Soul were first created, for we know that this lower world had lasted four thousand years before He came into it, but that He was first in God's purpose. *For* Him as well as "[f] *by* Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him." Man was created in the Image of Him, as He was foreseen in the Eternal Counsel of God; and all other things in this lower world were created for man's for Christian man's, sake: as S. Paul writes to us all, "[g] All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." The Angels therefore, who sang at the beginning of

[c] Job xxxviii. 4. 7. [d] Rev. iii. 14.
[e] Col. i. 15. [f] Ib. 16. [g] 1 Cor. iii. 21-23.

the world, sang also when He came, by Whom and for Whom the world had its beginning. The work of Creation and the work of Redemption had each its morning Hymn. The Angels sing for both, as in our catechism little children acknowledge both, saying, "I believe first in God the Father Who hath made me and all the world, and secondly in God the Son Who hath redeemed me and all mankind." To the eye of faith the second work is far the greatest: but to the eye of flesh what a difference the other way! Creation! When that word is uttered, men presently think of myriads of bright worlds, and it seems an exceeding great thought even to the natural unregenerate man. But what will such an one say to the work of Redemption in its beginning, to this one little Babe in the manger. The glories of the visible world, of the starry Heaven, have ever been magnified and thought much of by the great wise men of this present world: but Christ's spiritual glories, the glories of the Cradle at Bethlehem, were only shewn in the first place to a lowly tradesman and his wife, and to a few humble shepherds, who could but wonder and communicate their wonder to others.

We too are to believe and wonder: but as S. Mary's example shews, there is much more than that for us to do. For *we* know, the simplest child here knows, what, those shepherds and their hearers did not know. We know as in a mystery, but yet we really do know, how great this blessed Child is: we know that His Name and Being is Wonderful beyond all wonder, for He is Emmanuel, God with us. Very God made Very Man: and as we stand or kneel by

His manger-Cradle, we know better perhaps than His Blessed Mother herself then knew, what a work He has to do for us. Our Christmas thoughts are mingled with anticipations of Good Friday with Easter and Ascension-tide and Whitsuntide and Advent thoughts. If she then was so religiously careful, not as a loving mother only, but as the chief of God's Saints, to keep all these things and ponder them in her heart, see you not plainly, what He expects of us? While others were talking and wondering, Mary was treasuring all up, and counting her treasure; brooding over it in the secret of her heart, in all times and in all places. Her joy, her solemn joy, when she brought forth her first-born Son, did not pass away at the end of a few days or weeks or months: she did not so become used to the blessing, as to consider it a matter of course, and make little account of it: but all her life long she was keeping and pondering it in her.

So shall we, my brethren, if we at all wish to be wise, and dutiful and devout. We shall not let Christmas go at the end of these twelve days, but shall try to keep it with us in spirit all the year long. How may we do this? I will just give you two rules, drawn from the Church's collect for this good day. There, you know, we first acknowledge God's mercy in causing us to be "regenerate, and made His children by adoption and grace," and then we beg of Him that "every day we may be renewed by His Holy Spirit." Let it be our first rule, then, to put ourselves in mind every morning of our lives that we have been baptized, and made members of Christ—or as He Himself calls it, "New-

born in Him." Our Queen's eldest son, you may depend upon it, does not forget for a single day of his life, whom he belongs to; how great his place and rank is. No more should we. For we are all children of a King, even Him Who is King of kings. As Christians, we cannot think too much of our birth; we cannot hold our heads too high above the dirt and mire of the world; we cannot be too much afraid of low corrupting company. Therefore, as I said, it is well for us to begin all our days with one steady thought at least, Whose we are, and how near He has brought us to Him: that we may be more and more ashamed and afraid to do any thing unworthy of the brethren and sisters of Him Who is the Most High God. Let that be our first rule, taken, as I said, from to-day's collect.

And whereas in that collect we go on to pray God that we may daily be renewed by His Holy Spirit, this, I think, may furnish us with an evening rule, as the other part of the collect did for the morning. What if we set ourselves, every night of our lives, before we are over-wearied, and while we can yet collect our thoughts; what if we were then to consider seriously, how far the necessary wear and tear of the day may have damaged the Great and Holy Gift, which we bear about with us even from the font: that so, by earnest contrite prayer we may seek our pardon and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, and try, if it may be, through His grace, to be better children of God tomorrow.

Depend upon it, dear brethren, he who shall prevail upon you seriously to accept and practise such rules as these, will do much more towards making

your Christmas happy, than by any good wishes or any kind of presents he may make. "A happy Christmas"—it is in every man's mouth, but there is only one way for any one to have it in his heart. That will be, if he make this Christmas the beginning of a new life to him, whereinsoever the old life has been wrong. Why should we not? It is no more than is natural and necessary, if we verily and in earnest believe ourselves members of Christ. It is the most extreme peril to our souls, if we put it off. And the grace of God, truly and regularly sought, will make the change first possible, then easy, then delightful.

Surely the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Evil one; persecuting by our wilful sin or scorning by our carelessness the blessed Babe now born for us, and already beginning to suffer so much. Why should we spend more time in the fields of this world at a distance from Him? We are invited to Bethlehem, to the Lord's Home and Feast. Let us go there, and stay there, and strive and pray to learn more and more of religious adoring wonder. Reverential loving wonder, my brethren, is the very temper of the Saints in heaven, and even to such as we are, it is given to practise ourselves in it, as the Blessed Virgin did, by keeping all these things, and pondering them in our hearts. May we all find grace to do so: but that we may do so effectually, we must turn to Christ in all earnest devout ways, and must cry to Him night and day to help us against all the abominable things, which He hates, but we love only too well.

SERMON XIII.

HOW DID CHRIST LOVE US, AND HOW SHALL WE LEARN TO LOVE HIM.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

PROV. viii. 31.

"*My delights were with the sons of men.*"

MY brethren, did you ever see a person, supposed to be well off in the world, giving himself up to a hard life, to pain and labour, toil and danger, loss of rest and of many comforts, separation from familiar places and dear friends, and that perhaps for a great part, yea even for the whole, of his life? Yes indeed, it is a thing we often see. We see it, when young men having enough and to spare, and able, if they will, to live peaceably in their habitations among their friends, choose to go into the army or the navy, or to give themselves up to travel in some far country, or to some irksome and self-denying work at home: either to please themselves or some other, whose company or good opinion they seek.

This is a common case in life, and whenever it happens within our knowledge, we conclude of course, that the person so acting is moved by some great and special affection for the line of life which he so chooses, or for the person, for whose sake he

chooses it. And when a man enters on or persists in such a course, as many do, for the good of his fellow creatures, devoting himself, without fee or reward, to hospital work, or missionary work, or the like, you understand it to be a special work of charity; you admire such a man, and begin to love him yourself, for the great love which you see to be in him towards the bodies and souls of his brethren. How much more if you come to know that you yourself are of the number of the sick bodies or perishing souls which he was especially thinking of, when he so left his home and his comforts!

But what are all such instances of loving self-denial, that have ever happened since the world began; what are they, all put together, in comparison of that, which Almighty God calls on each one of us to remember on Christmas Day? the Day on which the Eternal Son of God, having taken on Himself to deliver man, and so not abhorred the Virgin's womb, came forth from that undefiled womb, as a Bridegroom out of His chamber, rejoicing for our sake to run His course on earth; His appointed course of humiliation and weakness, of poverty and want, of care and labours, of ill usage, persecution and reproach, and finally of cruellest torment even unto death. This was the course ordained for Him; and He knew it. The Cross, with all its disgrace and anguish, was from the beginning present to His Divine Soul. Yet He set forth towards it rejoicing. Why? Because He so dearly loved us, us, who had given ourselves up to His enemy, and without His special grace were sure to go on hating Him for ever. O hard of heart indeed must he be, and wanting in

all sense of love and thankfulness, who can think of that heavenly Babe, lying in that cold and lowly manger, and preparing to enter on all the hardships of this wretched world, ending in tortures and death, to save us from eternal death; hard and dull of heart must he be, who, when he hears of this, turns away from it unmoved and scornful, to look after his own selfish pleasure! Woe unto the man, who thinks to keep Christmas without remembrance of Jesus Christ; who goes on grovelling in the low ways of his heart, the ways of the world, the flesh, and the devil, while the Only-Begotten and most dearly beloved Son of God is leaving the bliss and glory of heaven to save him, and win him to Himself! He says, "My delight is with the sons of men." Can you find it in your heart to say, "[a] Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways?"

You may think yourself herein worldly-wise: but consider that the wisest of men, the great king, or, as we may call him, the great prophet Solomon; consider what he says of Christ's coming into the world, and see how his sayings put us to shame, as many of us as count it weariness to wait on Christ. Solomon indeed names not our Lord by Name. He speaks of Him in Proverbs under the title of Wisdom; but we are not the less certain that he means our Lord, and none else. We know that Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs signifies Him of Whom S. John speaks under the name of the Word: Who is Jesus Christ the Eternal Son of God. You heard concerning Him in this Day's Gospel "[b] In the

[a] Job xxi. 14. [b] S. John i. 1, 2.

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." These sayings are in meaning the same as those of Wisdom in the Proverbs. "[c] The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth: when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, was I brought forth." All this, I say, declares more at large what the Evangelist S. John signifies by those few words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." And whereas the Evangelist goes on next to speak of Christ's work of creation and to say, "[d] all things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made," Solomon expresses the same as follows: "[e] When He prepared the heavens, I was there; when He set a compass upon the face of the depth; when He established the clouds above; when He strengthened the fountains of the deep; when He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." This is "the glory which the Son of God had with the Father before the world was." And from all this He did in a mysterious way demean Himself

[c] Prov. viii. 22-25. [d] S. John i. 3.
[e] Prov. viii. 27-30.

and come down, when He made Himself one of us: as the Gospel of Christmas Day goes on to declare: "[f]The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us." The Almighty Son of the Almighty King, "Who was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him," in His unspeakable condescension vouchsafed to take such delight in us sinners, as to "rejoice in the habitable parts of His earth, and His delights were with the sons of men." Truly it was an inconceivable mystery of love, that He Who is "[g]of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," "[h]in Whose sight the stars are not pure," Who "[i]chargeth even His Angels with folly;" He should in such wise set His heart upon sinners, as to come down of His own accord and free-will, clothe Himself in the likeness, the nature, the flesh, of sinful man, make Himself really and literally near-of-kin to all the worst sinners that ever were, expose Himself to all the horror, all the misery, which cometh of sin; every thing but sin itself: for us sinners, haters of Himself and His Father, and with the certain foreknowledge that, even after all this, many, very many, would refuse to be saved by Him.

The joy of the Father, from everlasting, was in the Son: as it was declared at His Baptism, "[k]In Thee I am well pleased." The joy of the Son was in the sons of men: to come down, leaving the blessed angels in Heaven, the ninety and nine which had never sinned, and seek the lost sheep till He found it, among the thorns and briers and wastes of the weary and howling wilderness. "[l]He took not on

[f] S. John. i. 14. [g] Hab. i. 13. [h] Job xxv. 5.
[i] Ib. iv. 18. [k] S. Luke iii. 22. [l] Heb. ii. 16.

Him the nature of Angels," He emptied not Himself of His glory to redeem the fallen spirits, but "He took on Him the seed of Abraham." His word was, "[m] A Body hast Thou prepared Me . . . . . lo, I come to do Thy Will, O God." He so took our nature, as not only to be capable of making Himself obedient unto Death, even the Death of the Cross, but also to sympathise with all our griefs and pains and infirmities. "[n] In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." In Him "[o] we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He "[p] can have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way; for that He Himself also is compassed with infirmity." He did not only most earnestly desire the accomplishment of the sacrifice for which He came into the world—as when He said, "[q] I have a Baptism to be baptized with: and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" but even in the course of that work He allowed Himself, (I speak as a man) to be interrupted, and called away from His communings with His Father for the good and comfort of those whom He vouchsafed to call His brethren. A little while after the beginning of His Ministry, we read how that He rose up in the morning, a great while before day, and departed into a desert place, and there

[m] Heb. x. 5. 9. [n] Ib. ii. 17.
[o] Ib. iv. 15. [p] Ib. v. 2.
[q] S. Luke xii. 50.

was praying[r]; when Simon and His other disciples followed after Him, the literal word is, "came, tracing Him out," and found Him and said, "All men seek for Thee;" and He set out at once to preach in the neighbouring cities also. He left His prayers to look after perishing souls. Again: having withdrawn Himself with His disciples into a lonely place to rest awhile from the many who were coming and going, and leaving Him no leisure so much as to eat: presently the multitudes followed after Him; and He gave up His devotional rest, and began to teach them many things and to heal their sick. And you know how, twice in the depth of His Agony, He rose up from prayer and came to His three disciples, who should have been watching with Him, and warned them against temptation. It seems to have been part of the same loving condescension, that He did not, as S. John the Baptist, retire into the wilderness and abide in separation, but rather came, as He said Himself, "[s] eating and drinking;" sitting down to meat in Pharisees' houses; partaking of meals with publicans and sinners; discoursing with the Samaritan woman and with others by the way. In this sense also His "delight was to be with the sons of men."

And in another way, even now, and unto the end of the world, in a new and most wonderful way, He hath found out how to abide with us; giving Himself unto us day by day in that Sacrament which He hath taught His Church to know by the name of "our daily Bread."

In so many and so loving ways doth the Eternal

[r] S. Mark i. 35-37. [s] S. Luke vii. 34.

Son delight to make His abode with us children of men! How sorrowful then, how shameful, how fearful, when Christian men, (as too often happens), are found loving any companion, welcoming any chance comer, opening the door of their heart to any visitor, rather than to Him; turning coldly away, when even among dear friends they perceive that reading or conversation is taking a religious turn; tired of holy duties, public and private, almost before they have well begun; in a word, behaving themselves, as soon as they perceive that Jesus Christ is one of the company, as if they should say, "What a weariness is it!" O Lord, surely we have great need to cry mightily to Thee Who canst change men's hearts, that this extreme indecency and ingratitude may be cured among those "who profess and call themselves Christians:" that they may neither be, nor pretend to be, glad to get away from their Saviour, slow to come when He calls, eager to run back to the world! thinking the time long, and the cost great, when any work is being done, or any money laid out for Him. How sad to know that this is so common a case! among the younger sort too, who might be thought naturally more loving, less hardened against the natural feeling of gratitude to their greatest and best friend! How is it, that so few of you in your young days so much as think of loving Him because He hath first loved you? Alas! it is the selfish love of pleasure, either base, low, carnal pleasure, or at best mere diversion for your own self, which leads so many of you astray, keeps so many utterly irreligious, for the best years of their life. By and by you will bitterly regret it. The thoughtless, pleasure-loving

youth, the vain careless maiden, will in course of years, some sooner, some later, but every one quite certainly, arrive at a moment, in which they will long with all their hearts for one of the days or hours they have trifled away. They will long for but one of their lost days or hours to return, that they may live it over again, and live it better; but it will be a mere dreamy longing: there will be none to grant it; the past can never return to be amended; we can only repent of it; God grant we may do so. For example, take this very Christmas. I do not know, none but our Lord can know certainly, how any of you, old or young, is minded to spend the holy time: but this I know for certain, that you will be all of one mind by and by. Those who have delighted themselves in the Lord will only wish that they had done so more perfectly: those who have neglected the precious hours, and devoted them entirely to their own selfish satisfactions, i. e. to the world the flesh and the devil, will wish they had died before they came to this time.

If this seem dismal and fearful to you: if you cannot bear to think of yourself so cast away, so rejecting your Almighty Lover, and being eternally rejected by Him; listen in time to good counsel, which if you will take, it will help you to better things. What you want is, to learn how to delight yourself in the Lord. Could that lesson once be really mastered, you would soon leave off caring so much for earthly things; you would draw nearer to Him Who hath promised to draw nigh unto you. "Well!" you will perhaps say; "but I cannot change my heart: I have long had such and such

likings, and they are become quite natural to me: I cannot at once alter them and like just the contrary things. What would you have me do?" I will tell you, not all, but one thing out of many. I would have you acquaint yourself with Jesus Christ by an earnest, real, regular study of His Gospel: I mean His Gospel properly so called, the Life and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ, as set down in the four Evangelists. I say to any person who desires to learn, how to love our gracious Lord, "Read a little of one of those Gospels, a very little, every day; read seriously, with a desire to love Him of Whom they give account; and so by degrees you will, through God's help, come to know your loving Lord, such as He appeared to the simple well-meaning ones who saw Him bodily here on earth; and you will not be able to help loving Him; only you must accompany your good reading with one or two other good rules, quite within your power, which I am now going to mention. One is, that, while you are thus employed about the Gospel, you should carefully refrain from *bad* reading, all that you know or strongly suspect to be such; for what concord hath Christ with Belial? and what right have profane unbelieving words in the ear and heart which has just been receiving the words of our Lord Jesus Christ? It is but mockery to study the Bible one hour, and the next hour to be wilfully taken up with the scorn and unbelief of some worldly writer. And what I say of bad reading, I say of bad company, "'He that toucheth pitch," saith the wise man, "will be defiled therewith;" not the less so, if he have

[t] Ecclus. xiii. 1.

just before been washing his hands. What good will your Bible do you, if, the moment you close it, you go forth among those whom you know to be all day long disobeying it: whose behaviour shews too plainly, that they either disbelieve it or wish it had never been written? You must therefore, as I said, put by your bad books and your bad friends if you are really to make acquaintance with your loving Lord in His own Gospels. Moreover you must pray. The Holy Scriptures cannot be understood, you cannot open your heart to them, without God's grace, which can only be had by asking for it. But if you will really keep these three or four simple rules, To read thoughtfully and regularly, a little at a time, of the sayings and doings of our dear Lord in the Gospels; praying also regularly, and abstaining from bad books and bad company; a blessing, be sure, will be upon you; it will be as when the rock was smitten; the dry, hard, barren place will break out in springs of waters; you will begin to love Him Who shews Himself in His Gospels so very loving and lovely; by degrees His love will so grow upon you, that you will never feel happy without Him; and when a man has come to *that*, he has the true secret of being always happy with Him.

And still as you go on, and have begun to love Him a little, you will watch, for His sake, and be careful to *practise* yourself more and more continually in all acts of dutiful love. For love to God is like love to any one here; it must be kept up by *acts* of love, or it will soon fade away.

Wherefore, dear brethren, if at this holy season God has given you any good thoughts, be careful

above all things not to cast them away. The devil and the world will try to force them from you; but do not you let them go. The flesh will entice you to think of other things: but Christ is in these good thoughts: do not you cast them out. If your Christmas is to be truly a happy one, it must be kept all the year round, for the love of Him to Whom it belongs.

SERMON XIV.

OUR LORD'S THOUGHTS OF HIS CHILDHOOD ON THE CROSS; COMFORT AND STAY TO US.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

PSALM. xxii. 9. 10.

"*But Thou art He that didst take Me out of My mother's womb: Thou wast My hope, when I hanged yet upon My mother's breasts. I have been left unto Thee, ever since I was born: Thou art My God, even from My mother's womb.*"

You know Who it is, my brethren, that utters this strain of extreme sadness, finding no comfort, but in thus calling upon His Father. You know Who it is, or else you never would have guessed. We might have supposed, it was some poor outcast, some destitute beggar, on the point of starving to death, like the prodigal son in our Lord's parable, and remembering, as *he* did, the plenty of his father's house. Or we might have supposed it was some sick person, covered all over with boils, as Job, "from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head" "no soundness at all in him, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores[a];" or like Lazarus at the rich man's gate, full of ulcers, no balm in Gilead, no physician to heal him. Or we might have imagined it the

[a] Is. i. 6.

voice of a shipwrecked sailor at sea, just drowning, just about to sink and be lost in the "heap of great waters," his memory going back for a moment, to the care which was taken of him in his infancy, the safe and quiet consolations of his father's house. Or we might picture to ourselves a dark prison, and a person in it loaded with chains, and appealing to Heaven in extreme sense of his misery: or (sadder than all) we might say to ourselves, "This is the cry of a wretched lost sinner, despairing and giving himself up because of his sins: recollecting his quiet home and his innocent childhood, only to vex himself with the thought, that now all is gone by, that He Who blessed him then has now forsaken him." Some such imaginations as these we might have, were we to come suddenly upon words like those in the text, without knowing whose words they are. They would seem to us words, which might well suit any the most desolate and helpless and wretched among men: but we should never have conjectured, that He Who spoke the words, He Who uttered such sad complaints, as if He could do nothing for Himself, was the Eternal God, the Lord and Creator of all. And yet nothing is more certainly true. It was the Great, Holy, Eternal God, Who made all these complaints, and we may see, how He truly made them. For He had really brought Himself into these so great miseries and troubles for us. He, for our pardon and redemption, did really vouchsafe to be all that I have now supposed: a helpless outcast, not having a home to lay His Head in; hungry and thirsty, fasting in the wilderness, and no friend to give Him bread: covered all over with wounds and bruises

from Pilate's scourging, the people's buffeting, the nails, the thorny crown, and the spear: on the point of drowning in the deep of His Father's wrath, which He had cast Himself into, as Jonah, to save us: kept in most cruel prison the whole night before His Death; burdened with the chains, which His enemies had put upon Him: and, last of all, giving Himself up to the feeling, that His God had abandoned Him because of our innumerable sins, which He had taken upon Him. All this and more, more than tongue can utter, or heart of man conceive, did our Blessed Lord, of His own free will, endure. And as we, at times of sore trial and endurance, many times fly for comfort to the remembrance of our childhood, to the happy days and hours, when love, parental love, was watching us on every side; when we lay safe in our cradle, all anxious care being taken to prevent any harm or pain from coming near us: as the memory of fathers' and mothers' tenderness refreshes us, like a fragrant breath from a distance, coming and going, we hardly know how, when we are ready to lie down and die for faintness: so did our God and Lord Jesus Christ in the days of His Flesh, and especially in the hours when He was nailed to the Cross, in some mysterious way, He also like His frail creatures, when His heart was breaking, helped Himself with the memory of His Childhood.

Mysterious and aweful beyond our thought and imagination was the distress which had overwhelmed Him just before, the sense of being left desolate by His God and Father: "[b] My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? and art so far from My

[b] Ps. xxii. 1.

health, and from the words of My complaint?" How can it be that all My cries, by night and by day, should pass away unheard? Thou art the same God as ever, the God Who was so merciful to our fathers, the God Who was all in all to Me in times past, Thou didst never so leave Me before: why, now, how long shall it be so? "Thou art He that took Me out of My mother's womb: Thou wast My hope, when I hanged yet upon My mother's breasts. I have been left unto Thee ever since I was born: Thou art My God even from My mother's womb. O go not from Me, for trouble is hard at hand: and there is none to help Me." Thus we see that the first word of hope and comfort, the first word of prayer for Himself, which our Divine and merciful Saviour uttered on the Cross, came with the remembrance of His Birth, of that which happened on this most blessed Day. He calls upon the Father, as upon the God of His Nativity; the God Who had been with Him, to take Him at the appointed time out of the prison of His Virgin-Mother's womb; which He "did not abhor," because therein He began the work which He had taken upon Him, He began to deliver man by assuming man's nature; and at the appointed time He issued from that confinement; He was born into the world; and so accomplished another step in the journey of suffering, on which He had set out for our sake. And this, in His great love, He rejoices to think on; for this He doth in a way give thanks to His Father, even in the bitterest of His agony on the Tree. "Thou art He that took Me out of My mother's womb." Does it not sound, as though He condescended to have human comfort

even then in the recollection of what happened on Christmas night; how His blessed Mother, after her long and weary journey, was enabled to bear Him with safety, and, as it is believed, without pain; the original curse laid upon Eve, of bringing forth children in sorrow, being, as it is thought, without power upon her, because That Which was conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost, and without sin. She then had unusual strength, herself to wrap Him in swaddling clothes, to lay Him in His rude cradle, the manger, and to wait upon Him as a mother would wish. And this was in her Son's mind. He thought upon it, as it should seem, when He was looking down upon her from His Throne of sorrow and anguish, the Cross on which He was lifted up, and under whose shadow she was standing. He thought upon His Father's Love and His own, how it mitigated her sufferings on this Birthday; and, in the same unspeakable Love, He prepared for her that fountain of Divine consolation, the loving care of His beloved disciple, who should be in His stead to her, when He was out of sight. In this He was but carrying on at Calvary the same providential care, by which at Bethlehem He had sent His Angels, and had prepared and instructed the holy Joseph, how to respect her and wait upon her.

Further: our Lord's words on the Cross do not make mention of His Birth only, but also of the whole time of His Infancy. For, having praised God for taking Him out of His mother's womb, He adds, "Thou wast My hope, when I hanged yet upon My mother's breasts." This reminds us of what the Lord did for His Son, and in Him for us

all, in the exceeding danger of His infancy, when Herod would have set upon Him to kill Him, only that Joseph being warned by the Angel, took the young Child and His mother by night and departed into Egypt, and in due time He was restored safe to His own country, from the desert, and from that heathen land, "they being dead who sought the Holy Child's life."

Then, as the Psalmist goes on, "I have been left unto Thee, ever since I was born; Thou art My God even from My Mother's womb," so our Lord Himself told those who would fain have hurt Him but could not, "[c] The Father hath not left Me alone, for I do always those things that please Him." As that was (I speak as a man) His support in life, so the remembrance of it was, in some sense, a comfort in death. Whilst He declared His Human Nature, and His loving tender thoughts of His Mother, by repeated mention of the womb, and especially by what He says of hanging on His mother's breasts, He is no less careful to declare His Divine Nature, in that He says, The Father had never for one moment left Him alone.

Now, why did our dying Lord refer thus earnestly and distinctly to the hour of His Birth, and to the Father's tender care of Him then, and in His Childhood? One purpose, as it seems, was to shew forth His perfect sympathy, how He enters into all our feelings, and, among the rest, into that deep yearning sense of mother's love, which brings back the thought of that love so keenly into many hearts, long long years after men have been left orphans, when they

[c] S. John viii. 29.

most need comfort. When all goes against them, they think of home and parents; and often, by His mercy it is a soothing and a profitable thought.

To the believing heart the recollection of past mercies is indeed one of the best helps, both in affliction and temptation. In affliction, if a man has any sense at all of the truth, he can hardly help saying to himself, "[d] shall [I] receive good at the hand of God, and shall [I] not receive evil?" He has been with me, and helped me, so long: I must not complain, if I have my turn of suffering. And in temptation, if a man's heart be not utterly hardened and polluted, he must feel as Joseph did in regard to his master: God hath entrusted me with so many of His good gifts: "[e] How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against [Him];" or as David ought to have felt: God hath delivered me from Saul and made me king over Israel and Judah; how can I be so mean and ungrateful, as to break His plain commandment for my selfish pleasure? Yes, brethren, if we would but use ourselves to thank God in earnest for the mercies of our natural birth and perservation since, *that* ought to be enough to keep us from ever wilfully slighting or disobeying Him.

But much more when, with minds more becoming a Christian, we seriously reflect on our new Birth in Baptism, how we were then, as our Christmas collect tells us, "born again and made God's children by adoption and grace," He took us out of our mother's womb, out of the darkness and shadow, in which, as children of Adam, we were born, and caused us to behold the light of the true Day, His

[d] Job ii. 10. [e] Gen. xxxix. 9.

Son Jesus Christ. To this He would have us look back, if ever unhappily, through our sad backsliding, we should have forfeited His saving grace, and made ourselves, as far as we could, mere heathen again. Nay, He seems to say, *you* cannot be merely as heathens. Your sins, if you persist in them, are worse than the sins of heathens, and will bring on you a worse punishment: your pardon, if you truly and deeply repent, is sealed to you by the promise He made you in your Baptism, in a way which no mere heathen can depend upon. God Almighty, your soul's gracious Father, took you at the beginning out of your mother's womb. He gave you a new Birth, in His Church, whereby you are His own child: and ever since, while you hanged upon the breasts of the Church, your mother, and derived spiritual nourishment from her, He has been your hope. Now then in your present repentance, late and imperfect though it be, He says to you, Remember those early days, in which as a child of Christ and His Church, you were fed with that milk, which is appointed for the Church's children; remember, how you were taught from the beginning the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and the rest of the answers in the Catechism. It was to you as children's bread: you feel now that if you have not profited by it, the fault is entirely your own. Well then, take heart and be of good courage; the promise, which you have so slighted, yet holds good on your behalf, if only you will slight it no longer: "'Thou hast destroyed thyself,' saith the Lord, "but in Me is thine help." The Baptismal

[r] Hos. xiii. 9.

promise of pardon on repentance is your hope, even when you have most shamefully broken your Baptismal engagements. And why has the Baptismal promise so much virtue? Because in Baptism we were once for all made God's children: joined to Him, made members of Him Who, from all Eternity, is His true Son, and One with Him. Therefore, as our troubles and remorses take us back to our Baptism, so our Baptism takes us back to what we and all Christians know concerning the Birth of our Lord, that Birth which is the foundation of all our hope. When sad thoughts are burdening your heart, still more perhaps when evil thoughts are enticing it, then is the time to say to yourself, Is not the same good Father with me, Who took our Lord out of His Mother's womb, was with Him all along in the world, accepted His Sacrifice, raised Him to His own Right Hand? Therefore, my soul, be comforted: He *cannot* forsake thee: drive Him away thou mayest, but of Himself He cannot, will not, forsake thee. And again, to meet temptation, you may say, Christ is come into the world, Christ is conceived, Christ is born, to this very end, that He might be with me, to destroy the works of the devil: no excuse, then, nothing to plead, not a word to be said for me, if I go wilfully wrong. For Christ, Who by birth is among men generally, is in me especially by Holy Baptism. Greater then is He that is in me, than he that is in the world. The mercies of Christmas Day, sealed and conveyed to each one of us by his own Baptism, are indeed, comfort enough for all sorrows, and strength enough against all temptations, would we so take them.

For instance, what is a more ordinary temptation than self-indulgence, taking our own ease, and for the sake of it neglecting some duty, or doing it with wilful imperfection? We are enticed in that way almost every hour of the day. But surely if we would set ourselves at such times to think of God lying in the manger, it would make us ashamed of our softness, and content with hardships.

Again; how *unruly* we are, almost all of us: impatient, above all things, to have our own will contradicted, and to feel ourselves under restraint. When that feeling comes upon you, think of God Almighty in swaddling clothes, a helpless child, permitting Himself to be carried about at the will of others, and be content to be under rule.

[The conclusion of this sermon does not seem to have been written. Notes are written, to be expanded.

"God, waited on by shepherds—ashamed to be proud—content with them of low estate.

God made Man for love: ashamed to be unloving, selfish, indevout."]

SERMON XV.

OUR LORD'S NURSING FATHER.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

S. MATT. i. 24.

"*Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord had bidden him.*"

WE cannot surely think too much, now during these days of Christmas, of the wonderful sight which they shewed before sinful men, God manifest in the Flesh: God the Son, the Only Begotten, begotten of His Father before all worlds,—behold Him nursed in His Mother's arms, and then composed to rest in a manger; Him Who holds in His hands the heaven and the earth! Behold Him in deepest poverty, that we through His poverty may become rich!

If to a person of tolerable good nature any little child is an interesting object; if we cannot keep our eyes off them, so engaging is it to watch their ways, to measure their growth and improvement, to wonder and speculate on what is passing in their minds; how much more, when we are invited devoutly to consider the Cradle and Swaddling-bands of our Lord, to watch Him growing "[a] in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man;" and to

[a] S. Luke ii. 52.

pray, that by God's infinite mercy it may not yet be too late, even for such as we are, to become so far like that little Child, that we may not be cast out of the Kingdom of Heaven!

But the same Gospels which shew us Jesus Christ in His cradle, shew us also certain holy persons waiting round that cradle; and all those persons, no doubt, are intended to be our examples, deeply to be studied and loved, and carefully followed. The first and highest, unquestionably, is the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of our Lord and our God. No created being was ever so highly favoured as she was, or brought so near to the Most High and Eternal Godhead: she is the great pattern, next to our Lord Himself, of heavenly love, and purity, and humility.

But of the Blessed Virgin, and of the deep honour due to her, our Church has appointed other occasions for speaking. I shall now pass on to the third person, whose image naturally rises in men's minds when we meditate on the blessed Birth of our Lord. I shall say a few words to-day of the holy S. Joseph, the husband of Mary, and the reputed father of our Lord.

No man that we read of in Scripture was so highly favoured as S. Joseph, in respect of being constantly near the Person of our Saviour. From Christ's birth to his own death, which was at least more than twelve years, and very likely a good deal longer, Joseph was the entrusted guardian of our Lord; the minister of God, especially called and raised up to watch over that holiest Childhood and Youth, and to protect His blessed Mother. Judging from God's ordinary dealings in Scripture, we cannot but suppose that he must

have been more than almost any one prepared and made meet for God's Kingdom, who was permitted for so long a time to exercise a ministry so near to God Himself.

Again, we cannot but delight in imagining to ourselves the part which Joseph bore in that holy Family: how tenderly, how reverently he watched over the blessed Mother, and the Most Blessed and Divine Child: and we naturally look out for all that Holy Scripture tells us, that may help us to draw in our hearts that sacred picture.

The first thing we read in the Gospel concerning S. Joseph is, that the Virgin Mother of our Lord was espoused to him. For it pleased Him, when He would redeem our poor fallen manhood by taking it into His own nature, to be born of a betrothed Virgin, not of one altogether free. And of this the holy writers of old give several reasons. It protected the Blessed Mary from the evil report which she would have otherwise had to endure. It provided her with a friend, comforter, and helper in her poor and lowly life, and anxious care of the Holy Child. It veiled from the eyes of men, as yet unfit to bear it, the aweful mystery of the Incarnation of God the Son: and accordingly we find that our Lord was all along spoken of by ordinary acquaintance as "the son of Joseph," "the carpenter's son."

Again, some have thought it might be in God's purpose to hide from the evil spirits the glory of the Divine Child, and that this was done by ordering things so, that Satan might imagine Him to be the Son of Joseph and Mary; upon which he dared to tempt Him, and so, being defeated and baffled, was,

against his will, the cause of a great blessing to mankind.

And lastly, it may have been one point more in our Lord's exceeding humiliation, that He would be subject, in His childhood and youth, not to His Mother only, but to her husband also: whereas we proud sinners think it a great and happy thing to free ourselves, as much as possible, from submission and obedience; to be, as far as possible, our own masters.

It being then the will of our Lord that His Mother should be a betrothed, not a disengaged person, consider what manner of man he was whom He so chose to be His guardian. He was a poor hard-working man, a carpenter: so poor, that, as it may seem, he had not wherewithal to pay for a lodging at Bethlehem. Yet he was a person of high family, the very highest among the Jews. Both he and his espoused wife were of the house and lineage of David. These are circumstances very trying to the pride of man. Many feel to themselves as if they could bear poverty, but cannot bear decay and degradation; cannot bear to be in a lower place than they or their fathers have been used to. Not such, we may be sure, was the holy Joseph: and for his humble contentment, see how he was rewarded: he became the foster-father of the King of kings: the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth lodged in his house for many years.

The Holy Scripture having mentioned S. Joseph, makes haste to tell us what manner of man he was, to whom the Lord's Mother was betrothed. She being espoused to Joseph, "before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." This was

most likely on her return from her visit to her cousin Elisabeth, with whom she had continued three months after the Incarnation. Then "Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily." He was a just, good, righteous man, therefore he could not but acknowledge the holiness, and purity, and goodness of that holiest Virgin. He could not bear to condemn her, however appearances might seem against her. He durst not take her unto him, neither durst he put her to shame: his only way seemed to be, to separate from her privately and silently.

"But while he thought on these things, behold the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream," and told him what to do. Joseph was devout as well as just: he was accustomed to commit all his ways, all his thoughts, unto the Lord: and they who do so will find that He will surely, sooner or later, bring their good purposes to pass. An Angel will come to them in their perplexities: God's Providence will point out their way, where man's wisdom utterly fails: whatever pain they may have to bear, He will free them from wilful sin and deadly error.

Wonderful indeed was the message which the Angel brought, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." Wonderful unheard-of prodigy! New and strange thing created of the Lord in the earth! But Joseph was faithful as devout: he said to himself what was said to Abraham of another miracle, a faint shadow of this one: "[b] Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" The

[b] Gen. xviii. 14.

Angel perceived in his mind the same thought, which he had himself brought from heaven to the holy Virgin Mary, when he came to her with the same message, that she was to be the Mother of God. "[c] With God," he said, "nothing shall be impossible." And as she then believed, and received the unspeakable blessing, so now did the holy Joseph.

"And being raised from sleep, he did as the Angel of the Lord had bidden him." He lost no time: his good purposes of the night faded not away when the morning came; he did not begin counting and weighing difficulties and objections, and wondering how it might be. He did the Angel's bidding, and took unto him his wife. But "he knew her not, until she had brought forth her first-born Son." This is said, that the Holy Scripture may in every way witness to the wonderful Incarnation of the Son. And we may understand by it, how religiously, and holily, and chastely, the dutiful Joseph lived with her, whom he now understood to be, as it were, the spouse of heaven: how he watched and waited upon her, and had no thoughts towards her, but of reverence and brotherly love.

And now we are to think of the holy household, gathered and formed in Joseph's lowly dwelling in Nazareth, and imagine how for five or six months they abode peacefully and devoutly together. At the end of that time the decree of Cæsar, that all the world should be taxed, went forth. And Joseph had to conduct his wife, being great with child, on the winter's journey to Bethlehem; and when he came there, found no room for her in the inn; which shews

[c] S. Luke i. 37.

the deep poverty of the holy household, who had not money to provide themselves, at such a time, with any better lodging than a stable. We may imagine Joseph's tender anxiety, his joy and thankfulness when the Adorable Infant was born, his willing reverential attendance on the Virgin Mother, his aweful yet comfortable sense of God's nearer Presence, when the shepherds came and told of their vision of Angels, their message, and the Hymn which they had brought from heaven in honour of the Son of God.

Suppose eight days more passed, and the holy Joseph again shews his dutiful mind, by bringing the Blessed Child to be circumcised, and giving Him the Name which the Angel had twice brought from heaven. "Joseph," as a devout writer says, "is the pattern and model of godfathers." Those who are called to that sacred office would do well to remember him. When they stand by the Font, beside the new-born babe, or hold him in their arms, they may call up in their minds the picture of this great Saint, presenting their Saviour and his, to receive in His Flesh the token of obedience to God's Law, and to shed the first Blood for sinners. When they hear the child's cries, they may think of the pains of the Infant Jesus. When they name his name, they may in their hearts bow to that Name above every name, which S. Joseph at our Lord's Circumcision pronounced solemnly for the first time, after the Angel, who had brought it both to his spouse and to himself from heaven. Who can tell what additional blessing might be obtained for the babes whom we christen, if those who bring them to the Font would but try to pray for them with true affectionate

earnestness of heart, and resolve to watch over them, as they may, afterwards?

Going on with the Gospel history, we next see the devout Joseph adoring in heart with the Wise men, when they brought their precious offerings, and still growing in devotion to the Young Child, and reverence to Mary His Mother. That was on the day of the Epiphany, the twelfth from our Lord's Birth. On the fortieth day, the day of Purification, they journey together, to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord, and there they make their lowly offering, and hear the farewell hymn of the old Simeon, and his dark words concerning the future Passion of our Lord: and Joseph and His Mother, it is said, marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him.

Then we are to think of them returning for the present to Bethlehem, but soon disturbed by the Angel, warning Joseph to fly into Egypt from Herod; and we may represent to ourselves his unwearied care, how he waked when they slept, how he did every thing to lighten the long journey, and the painfulness of their abode in Egypt, among heathen strangers. And then consider what joy it must have been to him to receive the Angel's visit again in Egypt; to be visited with the tokens of God's fatherly care, when they were so far from their earthly friends; to be assured that they might safely return home again. And withal see their continued obedience, how without disputing, grudging, or misgiving, he at once does the very thing which the Angel had told him. But where the Angel does not interfere, there he exercises his own charitable prudence.

Having come back into the land of Israel, and finding that Archelaus reigned over Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither. God, approving his watchful fear, warned him in a dream which way he should turn, namely, into the parts of Galilee. And there, providentially guided, he chose for his abode Nazareth, his former home, not minding the ill report which was almost sure to attend him, and (what he might think of more) the Young Child after him, "[d]Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" "[e]Shall Christ come out of Nazareth?" This was afterwards said, and Joseph might foresee that it would be said: but he did not therefore resist the Angel, or argue with God. He went at once where God told him, and took the consequences.

Poor as Joseph and Mary were, they managed to afford one journey every year, and not a very short one, to Jerusalem, to the feast of the Passover. It was the law of Moses, and they knew that obedience is blessed; therefore they contrived somehow to keep that law. And God turned this again into a means of their obtaining a blessing. We know what happened when He was twelve years old; how His parents missed Him on their return, how eagerly they sought Him, how gladly found Him in the temple discoursing with the teachers of the law; how He returned with them, and was subject unto them, subject not only to His Mother, but to Joseph also. Joseph's name in all this history is carefully mentioned along with the blessed Mary's. He is even called one of our Saviour's parents, though in

[d] S. John i. 46. [e] Ib. vii. 41.

reality he was but His nursing father. And His Mother herself says, "'Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing."

Moreover, as I just now said, (and it is the last thing which Scripture relates of the holy Joseph,) our Lord and Saviour, during that astonishing time when He stayed quietly at Nazareth, veiling His greatness in the likeness of an ordinary child, was obedient unto him as well as to His Mother; thereby teaching adopted children, and all who are under guardianship, that they ought not to grudge a father's honour, and somewhat of the love due to a father, where they have so much of a father's care. And at the same time He offers great encouragement to the charity which leads men to take care of friendless children: it may humbly hope for some portion of the blessing, which came down on His own nursing father, Joseph.

More than this I do not know that the Gospels tell us any thing of this most venerable Saint: only it seems clear that he was dead before our Lord began His Ministry; and we may with reverence and fear think of the heavenly joy which it was to the spirit of S. Joseph, now at rest, when our Lord's Spirit, as the Creed tells us, descended from the Cross into the unseen world, and the Holy Family, in sight of men separated, began to be united again in the Paradise of God.

Such was the Life and Death of the nursing father of Jesus Christ: and it will be no unprofitable contemplation for us, now at the beginning of a New Year, if we will but learn this one great lesson from

[f] S. Luke ii. 48.

it,—*Never to put by* God's *warnings, but to act on them, in dutiful faith, immediately:* even as Joseph, being raised from sleep, lost no time, but at once did as the Angel of the Lord had bidden him. Had he doubted and delayed, he would have forfeited the blessing, the great blessing, of abiding continually with Christ. Let us, then, lose no time, but at once begin to practise the holy purposes which the Spirit of God may have put into our hearts, and which our good Angel is waiting to encourage. There is no time like the time present.

SERMON XVI.

AHAZ' REJECTION OF GOD'S MERCIES, AND WHAT IT PICTURES TO US.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY.

S. MATT. i. 22, 23.

"*All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a Virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His Name Emmanuel, which being interpreted, is, God with us.*"

ABOUT seven hundred and forty years before Christ, there was a very great disturbance and trouble in the land of Israel. Ahaz, who then reigned in Jerusalem, was sadly given to idolatry, and his people with him. The Lord therefore stirred up against him two of the strongest of the neighbouring powers, the king of Israel who reigned in Samaria, and the king of Syria who reigned in Damascus. Ahaz was at his wits' end, not knowing how to resist them. The prophet Isaiah was then well known, as God's inspired messenger among the Jews; and God sent him to meet Ahaz in his distress, and to give to him, and through him, to the family of David, encouraging promises. Ahaz, as far as we are told, rejected the gracious message; or if he did at all receive it, it was in an unbelieving and scornful way. So that, when God, Who is never tired of shewing mercy, offered him a sign or a wonder, by way of token

that the promised deliverance would surely come to pass, he declined it under pretence of religious scruples, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord."

Well, but what is all this to us? And what connection is there in this history with the time of Christmas particularly? For, that some connection there is you may be sure, seeing that this portion of the old Jewish history is appointed by the Church to be read on Christmas Day. And indeed it is, most entirely, a Christmas lesson. For Almighty God in His merciful wisdom took occasion from that wicked man's perverseness to utter that most illustrious prophecy of Emmanuel, God with us, to be one day born of a Virgin; whereby He not only comforted His ancient people, Isaiah, Hezekiah, and the rest of the religious Israelites, in those bad times, but He also lifted up a bright light to enlighten His own people, the Christian people, and to establish their faith in all times. For indeed, my brethren, this saying about Emmanuel is not a thing afar off, or too high for us; but if we take it rightly, we shall find that it cometh home to every one of us, to every Christian at every time, nay, to every human being who shall ever bear the name of Christ.

See in what a solemn way the Lord introduces the great wonder! He bids Ahaz ask Him for a sign[a]; and more, He leaves him to choose what the special sign should be; "Ask it either in the depth, or in the height above." As much as to say, "Look all round upon all things which I have made; up to heaven, down again to the earth; and say, what I shall do to convince you and your people that I

[a] Is. vii. 10-16.

am with you, and that in My strength you are far stronger than they. Ask it, if you will, in the depth; do, as Moses did, bid the earth open and swallow up the enemies of God's people; or ask it as Joshua did, in the height above: call upon the sun to stand still in the height of heaven, upon the moon to stay, until the Lord had punished the wicked: either of these wonders, if you desire it, God will give you; or anything else, equally or more wonderful." An astonishing offer to be made to one so wicked as Ahaz, more almost than one could have believed. When the like of it was made a few years afterwards to his dutiful and devout son Hezekiah, Hezekiah in his sickness called earnestly upon the Lord, and the Lord commissioned Isaiah to tell him that he should recover; and Hezekiah, remembering perhaps the offer made to his father Ahaz, asked for a sign, when he should be well enough to go up into the house of the Lord. Then the Lord, in His unspeakable condescension told Isaiah to offer the king his choice, whether the shadow of the sun-dial should go forward or backward; and, at his will, the great miracle took place, that a certain portion of time past was in a manner caused to return, to be lived over again by God's creatures.

So far Hezekiah had his choice of a sign. But Hezekiah was a good and dutiful servant of God, and it seems to us much more strange, that such an one as Ahaz, should be allowed the same liberty and even a greater; namely, to choose whatever sign he could think of, whereas Hezekiah only had his choice among two signs. Nowhere, that I remember in Holy Scripture, is such a privilege granted to any

one. There must have been some great purpose in granting it. What that was, who can tell? But thus much we may surely say, that to the worst of us all, to whom the Gospel of Christ is made known, a much greater favour is offered. For is it not even an infinite favour for a sinner to be made "a member of Christ," a "partaker of the Divine Nature," and finally to sit with the Son of God on His Throne? If you are inclined then to wonder, how Ahaz should refuse such an offer, can you not see that the Angels are wondering at you, that you should be so languid and lukewarm in accepting the Divine invitation; "Come to Me," "abide in Me, and let My words abide in you, and ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you [b]?"

Observe too, the manner of Ahaz's refusal. He said, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord." Under pretence of not daring to take so great a liberty he puts from him the hand which was reached out to help him; not with the humility of the good Centurion, who feared to accept a visit from his Lord, because he knew himself unworthy to have Him under his roof; not such was Ahaz' mind. Rather, we may believe that, in his secret soul, he did not like the thought of renouncing the false gods, and worldly helpers, such as the king of Assyria, on whom he had used himself to depend. By a sort of wicked instinct therefore, he would not ask God for a sign, when bidden to do so, and tried to make himself and others believe that this backwardness of his came of reverence, not of unbelief. Shall I tell you of what sort of behaviour among Christians this conduct of

[b] S. John xv. 7.

Ahaz seems to put one in mind? That very common practice of turning away from Holy Communion, and then saying, 'it would have been too great a venture for me to come,' and so going on contented with yourself for years and years, perhaps to the very end of your life. Depend upon it, it is not true Christian humility; it is rather a sort of heathen perverseness, when He says, "Come," for you to say, "I will not come, neither will I tempt the Lord." It is, at the bottom, much the same as Ahaz, refusing to commit himself to the God of Israel wholly and only. You have not the heart to become a communicant, because you have not the heart, entirely to give up evil things, as you know a worthy communicant must; because you do not in very deed care for God's favour, as for something better than the life itself. If you did, you would see and acknowledge in a moment, that God's invitations are not to be slighted, because we feel ourselves unworthy. Rather we should set about seeking to become worthy, in order that we may accept God's invitation. We must not stay away from the Feast, because our garments are defiled, but we must wash our garments and so come to the Feast.

See next, how the All-merciful deals with this wilfulness of Ahaz. You might have expected that He would turn away from him at once, giving him no sign at all, but leaving the wicked king and corrupt people to follow their own heathenish imaginations. Instead of that there is a fatherly reproof and a more than fatherly promise. The reproof—"[c] Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my

[c] Is. vii. 13.

God also?" God professes Himself in a manner wearied, tired, worn out, with such perverse ways of receiving His miraculous mercy: as He had said of the Jews' solemn services, "[d] Your new moons, and your appointed feasts My soul hateth, they are a trouble unto Me, I am *weary* to bear them:" and of their profane unbelieving talk; "[e] Ye have wearied the Lord with your words." God is weary of it; in the same kind of sense, as sensible and good men are weary, and loathe it altogether, when we repeat over and over the same vain and childish excuses for behaviour which we know cannot be excused. So God is said to be wearied, when we try to put a good face upon our breaking of His plain commandments, and to persuade ourselves and others, that it was done for some good reason, or religious feeling. He Who is the Truth cannot bear this shameful untruth. So much the greater is His loving-kindness in that He goes on at once to bestow upon those very persons, a glorious sign, more than those they could ask or think. "You, O house of David" (for to them, the message was sent, rather than to the Jews generally,) for all your king's perverseness, shall receive a sign from Me: not such as you might have asked or thought, but infinitely more. "Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son." It is your own sign, given to the family of David, and through that family to the whole race of sinful man: the great sign promised from the beginning; "the seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head;" and one to be given once for all. "A Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son." It is not, I say, a sign of judge-

[d] Isa. i. 14. [e] Mal. ii. 17.

ment, as might have been expected, but it is a sign of extreme mercy; even as God's way is to deal with the worst, the most hardened, the most deceitful of His enemies in the mildest and gentlest way; saying unto *all*, "Come unto Me;" putting *all* in mind of the lost sheep; crying out unto *all* most lovingly; "Here is one Who died for you, that you might henceforth not live unto yourselves but unto Him which died for you and rose again[f]."

And now we come to the great sign itself. You know, it took place in the Incarnation of our Blessed Lord. For His Mother, being always a Virgin, did conceive Him by the Holy Ghost, as it was promised; "A Virgin shall conceive." She was of the house of David, and this sign was promised to the house of David. She bare this Child, as on Christmas Day, as it was promised, "she shall bring forth a Son." She called His Name Jesus, which is, in sense though not in sound, the same as Emmanuel. For Jesus, means not simply a Saviour, but the Lord Who will save; and Emmanuel, God with us; God made one of us, to save us. And you will observe, that the prophecy is not, *she* shall call His name Jesus—but "they;" that is, people, "shall call His name Jesus." It shall be one of His Names, whereby His people shall continually know Him. And so indeed it is. I only wish the full meaning of that wonderful Name were as well known and considered among Christians, as the Name itself is familiar to them.

And whereas it is added in the prophecy, "Butter and honey shall he eat," we are to understand by this, that the young Child so wonderfully born should

[f] 2 Cor. v. 15.

be and continue to be one with us in all things but sin, that he should be fed, as other children, with things judged proper for his age, such as butter and honey, probably the common food for children in that country, which in our own time, and in our own country, I suppose, would be milk and sugar; and so would come gradually to the age for refusing evil, and choosing good: all which is fulfilled in the account, which the Holy Ghost by S. Luke gives us of our Emmanuel's Childhood, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man," continuing, nevertheless, all the while God of God, Co-equal and One with the Father. Thus He was a true and perfect Emmanuel; both "God," and also "with us."

As to the last words of Isaiah's prophecy, they seem to contain a sign mercifully given by the Almighty to comfort and support the good Israelites of that time, such as the young prince Hezekiah, and Isaiah himself, who must have deeply felt the dismal state of their country, and the sad decay of goodness and truth among them. In His immense pity, therefore, the God of love not only promised them this wonderful sign of Christ coming in the flesh, which they were to look on to in faith, but He confirmed it also, as to other times, by something which was shortly to happen before their eyes. In the course of two years, a shorter time than would be required for a young child to grow up, so as to know right from wrong, "to refuse the evil and choose the good," the land which Ahaz abhorred, which he was so grievously wronging and ill-using, as if he could not do it too much harm; that land

should be forsaken of both her kings. Both the kings who were laying it waste would be withdrawn from hurting it any more. And so indeed it came to pass, for the king of Syria and the king of Israel, both of them, fell by the sword, and the land had rest.

Great was this indulgence and merciful care of Almighty God for His people at that time: and like all His tender mercies, it was to be taken by them and by us as a pledge and sample of infinitely more to come, even of all that is meant by the blessed Name "Emmanuel;" that gracious Name, of which we can never think enough. For only consider what it is for the Most High God to be "with us," as He vouchsafes to be according to that Name. It is not merely, that He is present "with us," and in us, as our Preserver and Watcher, to keep us in the life and being, in which He at first created us. In that way He is present with all His works, with the dumb creatures, as well as with man. Nor does it mean His protection and fatherly care over His own chosen people; for so He was with the Patriarchs first, and then the Israelites, before He was Incarnate. But we can hardly say it once too often to ourselves, He is now "God with us," because He is really Incarnate, Very Man, Man indeed; "perfect God and perfect Man." Thus He hath made Himself for ever our Root and Head for all manner of good, as Adam our first father had come to be, for all manner of evil. He became our second Adam, the fountain of life and grace to all who are graffed into Him. He would have a soul and body like ours, that He might fulfil His love by dying for us, dying the death which we had deserved. Excepting only

that there was not in Him the least spot or taint or slightest beginning of sin, He made Himself like unto us in all things, all the infirmities of the body, all the sore anxieties and feelings of the soul.

And so He became our perfect Intercessor, offering up our prayers and other unworthy services, and pleading for us continually, with such a feeling of our infirmities as none but He can have. For as God He knoweth them all, and as Man, He is touched with them all. And as to sin, that miserable part of our being in which we might have thought the Pure and Holy One could not have sympathised with us, we know, it is our only Hope, that by some deep secret of Love, He hath taken it upon Him, so as to bear the whole pain, though the stain could not touch Him in the least.

All this, our Emmanuel has been to us all along; perfectly and entirely "God with us:" but alas! how imperfectly have we discerned Him, how little have we been with Him! But let us, in His strength, break our bonds, open our eyes, turn to Him once and for ever. If you have been like Ahaz, rejecting the sign, under pretence that it was too high for you, be like him no longer. Come dutifully, when God calls you; lift up your heart, try night and day, to think how near our Lord is to you. Let no sinner, not even the very worst, fear to draw nigh to Him. You might be wrong in asking a sign, but you cannot be wrong in accepting the sign, which the Lord Himself hath given you: His Son made Man for you. Fear not to draw nigh to Him, now at the beginning of a New Year, He is ready to hear you. Kneel down and open your heart to Him.

SERMON XVII.

OUR LORD'S NEARNESS TO US, OUR GREATNESS, BUT OUR TRIAL ALSO.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY.

JOB vii. 17, 18.

"What is man, that Thou shouldest magnify him, and that Thou shouldest set Thine Heart upon him? And that Thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?"

THIS same question, which was asked by holy Job in the time of the Patriarchs before the Law, was also asked more than once by holy David in the time of the Law, and we moreover find it taken up, even after the Law, in the full Gospel times, by the holy Apostle in his letter to the Hebrews. David sings in the eighth Psalm; "[a] What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" And in the hundred and forty fourth Psalm, "[b] Lord what is man, that Thou hast such respect unto him, or the son of man that Thou so regardest him?" which question S. Paul takes up in the second chapter to the Hebrews, and applies it to the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, he says, passed by the Angels that sinned. He never

[a] ver. 4. [b] ver. 3.

took their nature upon Him to redeem them. He went not up to His Father's Right Hand, to rule the world to come, in the form of an Angel. "[c] But one in a certain place," i. e. David in the eighth Psalm, "testified, saying, What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him. Thou madest him a little lower than the Angels: to crown Him with glory and worship. Thou hast put all things in subjection under His Feet."

Thus we see that both to the Patriarchs in the first age, and to the Prophets in the second, and to the Saints, and all of us Christians in the third, God's condescension to us men has ever been the wonder of wonders. "What is man, that Thou shouldest magnify him, and that Thou shouldest set Thine heart upon him," has ever been the question of thoughtful persons, feeling their own littleness and unworthiness, God's exceeding greatness and perfection, and wondering, each one on his own behalf, that the Pure and Holy God should do so great things for so vile a person.

At this time of Christmas more especially, we seem even forced to have this sort of question in our hearts. We cannot really meditate on the meaning of Christmas Day, without humbly asking, "What is man, that Thou shouldest magnify him?" For neither man, nor any of God's creatures, ever was so magnified, as by that which we remember at this time. The Manhood, as the Creed says, was taken into God. He Who is True God of True God took unto Himself our nature, complete both in soul and body, never to be divided. He was God for ever, but man

[c] Heb. ii. 6—8.

He was not, until about 1850 years ago; then He made Himself Man also, and is so at present and will never cease to be so. Do you not see what infinite "preferment" (if I may use such a word) this is to the whole nature and family of man? seeing that now there is no man so low and mean, nay, there is no man so wicked and lost in sin, but he is really and truly related to God Almighty: I say related, as we mean when we say that cousins are related to each other; even in the same way and not by any figure of speech is every one of the children of Adam truly and really akin to Jesus Christ; some nearer, some further off, but all truly and really akin to Him.

And why did our High and Holy Lord give us this unspeakable preferment? Because, as Job says next, He had "set His Heart" upon every one of us. He thinketh of all men, He knoweth all men, He will have all men to be saved. There is not one of us too insignificant, too lost, too fallen, so as to be forgotten by Him, or shut out of His gracious purpose. Whoever may be lost, it will be by their own fault, not by His overlooking or denying them help. You may be sure of this. For if good men, frail as they are, take care not to forget in their prayers such as belong to them, their kindred, families, and near friends, much less will He forget, Who puts all the kindness into their loving hearts, and the prayers into their mouths. If S. Paul said to his Philippians, "I think of you all, because I have you in my heart[d]," much more will the great "Shepherd and Bishop" of all Churches, and of all our souls Who laid down His life for us, much more will He set

[d] Phil. i. 7.

His Heart upon each one of us, and do for every one the work of an Intercessor and Mediator; and of a Saviour too at the last, if we will let Him. Therefore He has put it in the heart of His Holy Church throughout all the world to keep this blessed time of Christmas; that there might be no person, man, woman, or child old enough to understand any thing, but might be quite sure that God has not forgotten them; that they have a friend and and a kinsman in heaven, even at the Right Hand of the Father.

I say, He is *our* friend and *our* kinsman, as truly as He was the friend and kinsman of those who were alive at His Birth, and who knew Him when He was on earth. He still continues to be so in spite of our much neglect and our manifold provocations. Job stood astonished, that the God of the whole world should so befriend weak and sinful man, as not only to create him at first, but also to visit him every morning: as it is written in the Book of Lamentations: "[e] His compassions fail not, they are new every morning." And indeed it is most wonderful to think of the thousands and millions who wake at the beginning of each new day, or, as it is just now, of each new year, and find themselves still preserved in health and safety, the mercy of our God waiting, as it were, beside their bed, to raise them from their helpless slumbers, and set them forward on the task appointed for next day or next year. This is wonderful. But it is still more wonderful, that our Lord Jesus Christ, God made Man for us, the God Who made us partakers of Himself long since in Holy Baptism; that, after all our neglects and backslidings,

[e] Lam. iii. 22, 23.

He should still visit us every morning, being present in our rooms, to see whether we turn ourselves to Him for the very first thing; whether we say our prayers as we ought; whether we lift up our hearts in thankfulness to Him at every meal, scanty or abundant; whether we set about our work honestly and diligently, in His faith and fear, as He wrought under Joseph the carpenter. Thus Christ visits us every morning: and not in the mornings only, but He continues also with us, and "tries us," as Job goes on to say, "every moment." Having made us members of Himself by the power of His Holy Spirit, and so given us power to resist temptation, and keep ourselves, if we will, from all wilful and grievous sin, He leaves us not, but abides with us from morning to night, trying us every moment: trying, whether we are really and in earnest using the grace which He hath given us. If we are alone, He is there, trying us by our thoughts. We *must* think of something, and the devil, if he can, will set us upon thinking of mischief. He will corrupt our fancies, if we will let him, with dreams and images of sinful lust. Or he will fill our souls with bitter, envious, grudging, discontented thoughts, as he did the souls of Cain and of Saul, the one, envying Abel; the other, David. Thus may Satan, if men permit him, prevail on them to commit in the heart, many times perhaps in an hour, such deadly sins as murder and adultery. Or if a man's trial be not so grievous as that, yet still it is a great and a sore trial, whether one will go on thinking on earthly things only, or endeavour to do all as unto the Lord, and in His sight. It is a hard fight, to lift up our hearts steadily

to Almighty God, when we are alone with Him to use ourselves to seek His favour more than we seek anything else whatever. It is a hard fight, and therefore it has a great reward; for this is that purity of heart and purpose, of which our Lord Himself declared, "'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Our Saviour then comes to us, when we are alone, to try us every moment in respect of purity; and when we are in company with others, He tries us no less in respect of charity. Is it not so, my brethren? When we are with any of our fellow creatures, are we not every minute tempted to say or do something unkind, peevish, scornful, selfish; to think or speak evil, to vex, and tease, and provoke them; to make a jest of them, rudely or contemptuously; to encourage them in sin or folly, to prefer ourselves to them? In short, the ways cannot be counted, in which we are tempted and tried every moment of our being in society, whether we will thoroughly and entirely do, as we would be done by, or no.

In this respect our condition in life makes very little difference. Whether we be rich or poor, in trouble or prosperity, some trial we must needs have, and that daily; nay, every moment. The difference is only in the kind of trial. When things go well, and your spirits are high, presently there is danger of your growing worldly, proud, and careless: when you are in grief, fear, or disappointment, every hour there is danger of irreligious discontent, envy, selfish laziness. Let us recollect, each one of us, how have we passed this year? To many, God has been good

[f] S. Matt. v. 8.

and gracious: death, calamity, sore distress, have not come near their dwellings: they and those whom they are most bound to love have been preserved in health and peace. Some on the other hand have been smitten more or less severely. This new year, if they live to see it, will not arise on them like former new years; they will miss some beloved presence, or the times will seem otherwise altered and strange to them. Very different in many respects will the departing of the old year be to some among us from what it is to others. But in this respect it will be to all alike, that it will be the end of a year of trials; its months, weeks, days, hours, and minutes, whether sad or joyful, in peace or in trouble, have all of them, in their several ways, been proving us, what we are towards God; and according to our behaviour, they have brought us on. We are, of course, in mere time, so much nearer our latter end; and we are also, in the frame and habit of our souls, so much fitter for Hell or for Heaven. This is a very startling thought; but indeed, my brethren, it cannot be gainsaid. According to our behaviour, every one of us is, on this day, so much more like an Angel or a devil, than we were on this day last year. We see, very generally, how the year has told upon our bodies; how much children are grown, how old men's hair is grown whiter, and their steps more feeble; how those who have had severe trials bear the mark of them in their frame and countenance: nor need we doubt, that if we could see their souls, our own souls and our neighbours', we should discern quite as much alteration; some gradually decayed and corrupted; others brightening more and more. We should find

that, neither in spirit nor body, hath any one "continued in one stay" during the last twelvemonth. This, we should see as clearly as the sun at noon-day, if only we had eyes, as the Angels have, to perceive souls, and the doings and state of souls. As it is, we see not these things, but they are not therefore the less real. And though we do not see them, we may, if we will, be aware of them. We may, if we will, examine ourselves, what trials we have had, and how we have behaved under them, since the last new year. We may, if we will, recollect whether we were then in the way of turning to God before all things, and whether we have come to be so since; whether we try in earnest to think of God, and give ourselves up to Him, the first thing when we wake in the morning; whether we pray as regularly, as often, as attentively, as we did then; and so of all the rest of our duties: and, if not, what has hindered us. And so of all our other duties; if we have at all used self-examination, if we have at all attended to our souls, as we know that God has been trying us every moment, so we must have some notion, how we have met His merciful trials. If there are any to whom the whole has passed away like a dream, who could not if they were asked give any account of themselves, I should fear they can hardly be in the right way; they can hardly have attended, as they ought, to their souls during this year. They have regularly dressed and undressed their bodies, as regularly as the morning and night came on; but they have taken no care to unclothe their souls of bad habits, and dress them in holiness. They could give some account of their health, if the physician asked them,

but they would be at a real loss, not from shyness, but from sheer ignorance, if the physician of souls came and asked them of their *inward* health. The one thing for such thoughtless persons, young or old, to set about immediately, is *self-examination*, strict and regular; and their one prayer might well be, that God would give them a new and contrite heart, a heart full of penitence, for the sin of so neglecting the soul, for which He cares so much.

And believe me, my brethren, we are deeply concerned, one and all, to consider, more than we have done, this great and fearful truth, that God tries us every moment. So it was in former years; so it has been in this present year, so it will be in the next year, if we live to see it. I would, we might all enter upon this new year with a deeper and more serious conviction than ever, how that every moment, and all that happens every moment, is part of our great trial. I wish we may pray in earnest, that God would open our eyes, to understand in some measure, how very weighty and serious all things are, both what we do, and what our Father does to us. Recollect once again that ancient lesson, taught by the Holy Ghost to His servant Job. "What is man that Thou shouldest magnify him, and that Thou shouldest set Thine Heart upon him." He magnifieth and maketh much of us; therefore He requireth us to make much of ourselves. He would have us to understand the worth of our own souls. Again, "He hath set His Heart upon us." Jesus, that good Saviour, hath set His Heart upon us miserable sinners, upon making us happy, and lifting us up with Him to Heaven. Why should you disappoint Him, and ruin yourself? "He

visits you every morning:" will you not turn towards Him? "He tries you every moment:" trial is in order to judgement. If He tries now, of course hereafter He will demand an account. Beware of letting things pass lightly away; such things, I mean, as calls, opportunities, warnings; stop yourself, when you are tempted to say, "This and that is of no consequence; what signifies a few months, or a few years later, if one is but really and entirely converted at last?" We may think to dream our years away, like so many pleasant shadows, not permitting any thing to affright us. But bye and bye those years will awake, and prove themselves very real, very dreadful, to conscience and memory. Before that Day comes, after which there will be no new year, had you not better force yourself to search and examine your account, while He Who visits you every morning yet offers to receive your true repentance and faith in His Cross, as full payment,—before the Books are closed for ever? Depend upon it, the first trouble will prove the least.

SERMON XVIII.

THE SAVING NAME.

THE CIRCUMCISION.

S. MATT. i. 25.

"*He called His Name* JESUS."

NOT without God's special Providence is it ordered, that our year should begin with a great Day, the Day of the Circumcision of the Lord Jesus; the Day on which He received His saving Name. We seem to see the Holy Family, Joseph and Mary and the Blessed Young Child, gathered again after seven days to keep their Christmas a second time; according to the law of Moses, and the custom of God's people from the beginning. Seven days has always been a mysterious period: the eighth day has always been a solemn time; ever since God in the beginning took seven days to complete the creation of the world. The eighth day is the first over again; like the eighth note in music! and they are both called Octaves. We are to-day again to strike the same note of joy, which was sounded in all the Churches on Christmas Day. For now our Incarnate Lord is eight days old; and as, on Christmas Day, He declared Himself Partaker of our imperfect nature, so to-day He declares Himself

Partaker especially of Abraham's seed, and subject to the law of God, to do its work and submit to its sentence, in our behalf. His Incarnation He declared by His Birth, His submission to the Law by His Circumcision. And as the seal of both, and as the pledge of greater wonders to come, He received at the same time His Saving Name, JESUS: that Name which for thirty years and more was the token of His deep Humiliation, but is now exalted to be above every name; that Name, at which all knees are commanded to bow, of things in Heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth: that Name of the Lord, which "[a]is a strong tower," for the righteous to run into and be safe.

To this Name of Jesus, then, our mind is especially turned by the Church at the beginning of the New Year. She builds up this tower for us, that we may run into it, and be safe. Let us try, in humble obedience to her, to have some good and saving thoughts of that Holy and Saving Name, and how it has been, and may be, made saving to us.

First, why was it given at our Lord's Circumcision, and not rather as soon as He was born, seeing it was known beforehand? For the very same sort of reason, that we have our new name in Baptism. It has been usual with the Almighty, when He bestows a great blessing, or brings anyone near to Himself, to change their name; as in Holy Matrimony, the woman, we know, takes her husband's name, signifying that she belongs no longer to herself, nor her parents, but to him. Abraham, Sarah; Jacob, Joshua, S. Peter, S. Paul, are all of them instances

[a] Prov. xviii. 10.

of names changed by the Almighty in token of His blessing. And accordingly it was ever the custom of God's people, Israel, to give their children their names at the time of their circumcision. At that time they were brought nearer to God; He acknowledged them as His own, not heathens, but children of Abraham; and that they might always have something to remind them of this privilege, it was tied, as it were, to the very name by which they were always called and known; they bare it about the world with them; as we bear always our Christian name to betoken our being Christians.

This then was the reason, why our Lord's Name was given at Circumcision. He condescended to be one of His own people, and to be named as they were; named by His reputed father S. Joseph, a poor tradesman and little esteemed, yet permitted, we see, in a certain sense, to be Godfather to the Son of God. *He*, S. Joseph, called His Name, Jesus: having been so instructed by the Angel. He is the pattern of Christian Godfathers, as the Holy Infant Whom he brought to be circumcised is the Type and Figure of all Christian children.

But why was this Name chosen in preference to all others? In one sense, it was an instance of our Lord's Humility; as if He should come down and choose to be called by some of the names which are common and ordinary amongst us; for Jesus was at that time no uncommon name among the Jews of all ranks. So far, His being called by it was the same sort of self-abasement, as His appearing like an ordinary young man, working at an ordinary trade. But yet there was in the Name an unspeakably high

and holy mystery; so glorious and loving, that it needed an Angel twice coming down from Heaven to declare it unto us. For the Name means, Jehovah the Saviour, or, the Lord God, He will save: and it is indeed the same in meaning with Emmanuel, God with us: signifying that the work of our salvation is too high for either Saint or Angel. God Himself, God the Son, the Second Person in the undivided Trinity: He, and no other was to humble Himself to be a Man, and to be crucified. And again, the Name Jesus signifies the great things which He mercifully came to do for us, in that it is the same with the name Joshua. For Joshua, you know, had a very special office. He was to lead the people of God into Canaan, the promised land, the place of rest prepared for them. So our Lord came to lead us into the Kingdom of Heaven. Moses could not bring Israel into the good land; no more may the Law of Moses make men righteous and holy, members of Christ, and heirs of His Kingdom. As therefore Moses died, that Joshua, who is called Jesus, might bring in the people, so the Law came to an end, that Christ and His Gospel might do their saving work. And as, under Joshua, the children of Israel destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, so under Christ, and by the might of His Banner, the Cross, Christian people are ever fighting against the seven deadly sins; we cannot, we must not be at rest, until we have quite subdued every one of them in thought, word and deed.

Here then, my brethren, is a joyful, yet serious thought, which we shall do well to carry with us all through this New Year: that the very name by

which we are called marks us for members of Him, Who being God, was made Man to die for us: that it binds us also to fight under His Banner against every kind of sin. For we are baptized into Christ. His Holy Spirit then comes down to make us parts, branches, members of Him. Whatever then is our own proper name, the Holy Name, the Name Jesus, is, in a manner, our name also. Wherever we go we are called Christians, i. e. we are called by the Name of Christ; yea, we are partakers of the Name of God Himself: according to that in the Psalm, "[b] I said, ye are gods:" and according to the form of Baptism, which properly is, "I baptize thee *into* the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost:" I make thee, by this heavenly Sacrament, partaker of the Divine Nature, so that henceforth thou mayest even be called by the Divine Name, the Name Christ, the Name of Him Who is God and Man.

See, Christians, the greatness of our blessing, in that we are called Christians. The very Name of our God is communicated to us; it is made in a manner our own name. Everywhere and at all times, as we go about in our daily employments, as often as any one calls us by our Christian name, it is as the voice of God putting us in mind, Whose we are and Whom we serve. Our surname, which we had first, even from our very birth, may remind us indeed of our sinful parents, and of the evil nature we have from Adam; but our Christian name, added afterwards at our Baptism, is a sure token of better things, a pledge of our being redeemed and made part of

[b] Ps. lxxxii. 6.

God's own holy Family. Our ordinary acquaintance, in a general way, know and call us by our surnames. So the children of this world look upon us, and think of us as we are in this world, sick or well, rich or poor, thriving or decaying: but our near relations and intimate friends call us, we know, by our Christian names: so the holy inhabitants of Heaven watch and know us, as we are in the sight of God: they watch to see how we are going on in respect of our high and heavenly privileges; whether we are in the broad way or the narrow; whether we are getting nearer our true Home or no.

And the Day reminds us, in what special regard they watch us. God grant that, in the year which is now beginning, we make a better return to their care, than we have in past years. May we so remember the Most Holy Name by which we are called, as to find effectual help in it against all wilful sin; so as never to blot out or lose the Most Holy Sign with which we are sealed, the Sign of the Cross of Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XIX.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF HOLY OBEDIENCE.

THE CIRCUMCISION.

Ps. cxix. 1.

"*Blessed are those that are undefiled in the way: and walk in the law of the Lord.*"

It seems natural for us to think a good deal, during the twelve days of Christmas, of the Holy Family at Bethlehem. So much as we care for the mere time, the days of remembrance, the shadow of what really happened, it must sometimes come into some of our hearts, how great a thing it would have been to have lived at that time and place; to have belonged to Bethlehem, for example, or Nazareth, and to have seen the blessed Virgin Mother and the holy Joseph, going in and out, where the Divine Child was; bearing Him in their arms, and waiting upon Him. As we read and hear the lessons of this last week, if we pay any attention at all, we cannot but have pictures in our minds of the stable where that Blessed One was born; of the manger in which He was laid; of His pure and holy Mother kneeling beside Him; of Joseph waiting by in humble and dutiful adoration; of the Shepherds on the neighbouring hill, and the light of the Lord shining

round them, and the Angels suddenly bursting upon their sight; and afterwards of their coming in, and beholding the Blessed Babe with their eyes. All these have been pictures of things, places and persons, poor indeed, and mean and low in the world's estimation, yet in themselves quiet and undisturbed, and so far comfortable and refreshing. But our Lord had left His Father's Right Hand, and come into this lower world, not to live here in ease, quiet and comfort, but to pass through a few years of pain and toil and trouble to His Agony and Bloody Sweat, His Cross and Passion. Accordingly, when He was now but a week old, He began to suffer pain, the pain of the circumcising knife, and to shed His Blood for us sinners. The picture, which comes before our minds to-day, is mingled in some degree with sorrow and tears. But it only brings out more clearly this circumstance, which a thoughtful person cannot fail to observe throughout the whole of this history of the Holy Family; namely their extreme dutifulness. Whether it is the Blessed Virgin we look to, or the holy Joseph, or the Shepherds, or Wise men, who came invited to adore our Lord, this is the thing which we seem to observe; their being always ready to do the very thing God would have them, as soon as they knew it. As their place was like that of Angels, being allowed to draw so very near the Almighty, so their *mind* was like that of Angels; not waiting nor doubting, nor making excuses, but at once fulfilling His commandment, and "[a] hearkening to the voice of His word." They were like the host of heaven, standing in their watches, and as soon as the Lord called, making

[a] Ps. ciii. 20.

answer and saying, "Here we are." Thus, whereas the history of the Holy Family begins with the Angel Gabriel's visit to the Mother of our Lord, see what an example of entire self-devotion she sets us. "[b] Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to Thy word." It was a fearful, an aweful visitation to her, though so full of transporting mercy, especially when she was as yet unaware, "what manner of salutation this might be:" and in respect of this world, it brought with it one of the severest trials. For other persons might think, as Joseph at first, that she had done wrong. But none of these things moved her: her desire, her joy and her comfort was, to give herself up at once and entirely to the will of the great and merciful God. Thus, as the beginning and end of our redemption was all of God's free and undeserved mercy, so we see, that its beginning was met on the part of mankind by entire devotion and self-sacrifice. And at each step, as we go on, the same two things meet us again together.

Another step in the history of the Holy Family is the Angel appearing to Joseph and saying, "[c] Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a Son and thou shalt call His Name Jesus." And then the Gospel goes on to say, "Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife, and knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born Son, and he called His Name Jesus." Here again we see the dutifulness of the holy Joseph. He thankfully accepts the comfort which the Angel brought him,

[b] S. Luke i. 38. [c] S. Matt. i. 20-25.

and makes the sacrifice, which he plainly saw God would have him make, at the same time. He joyfully and humbly takes on himself the place of guardian to the Incarnate Saviour, and is content to live with his wife as a parent or elder brother, for the honour of the aweful Mystery of the Lord's Incarnation, of Jesus Christ our Lord, and of His holy Mother. It is not said that the Angel commanded this, but S. Joseph's dutiful mind made him feel what was right and what God would have him do, even without any command in words.

The next thing is their going to be taxed. At Cæsar Augustus' command, they leave their own home and take the long journey to Bethlehem, long for a person great with child; in order to be registered in the appointed place. Perhaps this is a hint for us, that such as are dutiful towards God will always be ready to obey kings and magistrates, in matters not plainly contrary to the law of God, without making difficulties and exceptions.

Then see the obedience of the shepherds, and afterwards of the Wise men, how they set out immediately when the Angel or the star directed them: by night or by day, far or near, to Jerusalem or to Bethlehem, among strangers or the poorest of their own people, the faith that was in them caused them to make no difficulties, but to begin, continue and end all that they had to do, exactly as they heard the Lord's commandment.

Eight days more pass and we come to the Circumcising of the Child. The Law was particular about circumcising on the eighth day, so much so that even the rest of the Sabbaths might be broken in

upon for that purpose; and Joseph and Mary were exact in keeping the Law. They did not say, "What difference can a day more or less make? it is but an outward ceremony: we will please ourselves in it, and do according to our own convenience." But the one thing thought of was, "This is commanded, therefore we will do it."

"And His Name was called Jesus, which was so named of the Angel before He was conceived in the womb." Here again is the mercy of God and the obedience of Saints met together. God gives the Holy Name, twice sends an Angel with it from heaven as a token and kind of sacrament of His Love: and they gladly receive it, treasure it in their hearts, and use it, when the time comes, exactly according to His direction.

After this we see the Holy Family in danger; Herod intending to seek the Young Child to destroy Him: and the Angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, and orders him into Egypt by night: into Egypt, a long journey, and across the waste wilderness: and by night, with all the inconveniences besides of travelling with an infant and a mother but lately delivered. But they make no difficulties: they do not even like Lot, utter a wish for some nearer place of refuge: it is enough for them to be commanded and to obey the command.

There is no need to go further in the history. This is quite enough to shew that the principle of the Holy Family, from beginning to end, was a principle of obedience. They did not look to what seemed convenient, or profitable in the world, or customary among other people, or suitable to their own fancies

and notions of right and wrong: but this one rule they walked by, "[d] Obey My Voice." When God had spoken, they laid their hand upon their mouth. All along we are told concerning them, They did as the Angel had bidden them, They named Him as the Angel had done before, Being warned of God they did so and so. This was the very reason why they were a holy Family because they feared and obeyed God's word, and so became such as His Holy Spirit has always delighted to visit and to dwell among. God's free mercy was all along met on their part with a lowly and dutiful heart, "Be it unto me according to Thy Word." That was the saying of the chief one among them, of her who was nearest to the Divine Child: and by that saying the whole household was guided. Thus plain and simple obedience, doing in every case the thing which God would next have done, because He would have it done: such obedience as this caused their house to be a place where God Incarnate delighted to dwell.

Here then we have a rule from Almighty God Himself, how Christian families should keep their Christmas, how they may make sure to themselves a happy New Year. Let them try and resolve to be holy families; meekly surrendering themselves, like that most Blessed Mother, to receive God's unspeakable mercies, and to do His will; let them resolve, now at length to spend this new year conscientiously, so much of it as God shall allow them here on earth; let mothers and sisters remember the Holy Virgin; fathers and brothers the chaste and righteous Joseph; young children (happiest of all)

[d] Jer. vii. 23.

let them remember the Holy Child Jesus Himself; let this Holy Family be in our minds night and day, now especially at this Christmas time, when households assemble, and family thoughts and feelings, delights and duties, take up all our minds so much: and let us all resolve by God's grace, so to give up our wills to His during the year that is beginning, that our families too may be in their measure holy, at least far holier than they now are, by the time Christmas comes again. May Almighty God bestow on us this grace, for His Son's sake, Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XX.

SELF-DENIAL, A MAIN LESSON OF THE GOSPEL.

THE CIRCUMCISION.

DEUT. X. 16.

"*Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.*"

IT is a thing much to be observed, that many of the outward and visible signs, which God has ordained His people to use in worshipping Him, have somewhat in them to remind us in some way of suffering, affliction, pain, self-denial, death. Thus Sacrifice, which was the great act of solemn worship among the Patriarchs and Jews, was the slaughter of some innocent animal, and the pouring out of its blood before God. Thus the Holy Communion is the remembrance of our Saviour's Death, His violent and bitter Death. Thus Baptism, the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven, when performed in that way which the Church in her Prayer Book prefers, is also a memorial of His death and rising again; of His Death, by the burial of the child, just for a moment, under the water; of His Resurrection, by the same child's being immediately lifted out of the water into the minister's arms. It is a memorial of our Lord's death: and it is also a token, pledge, and means of

a real death, which the baptized person does at the same time undergo, an inward death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness: and it is a token of the sort of life to be led hereafter in this world, a life according to that death; as S. Paul said, "[a] I die daily;" a life in which a man has continually to keep himself in order, to deny himself many things which he would like, and to choose and embrace many things which he naturally dislikes. This is the sort of life of which Holy Baptism is the beginning; and it is signified to us by the very act of baptizing.

But of all Church ceremonies, there is none which so distinctly sets before us our call to suffer, as that which has, from the beginning, always gone along with Baptism; the signing the newly baptized with the sign of the Cross. The Cross is the very height and depth of all suffering. The very name presently tells us of a Soul exceeding sorrowful even unto death; of sweat, like great drops of blood falling down to the ground; of a burden too heavy to be borne; of reproach, scorn, shame, spitting; of scourging and a crown of thorns: of Hands, and Feet, and Side pierced; of crying with a loud voice, and yielding up the Ghost: all this and more, more than man's heart can understand, comes into a Christian's mind when he hears of the Cross. What, then, can we understand by the Cross marked on us from our very childhood, but that we too are to go on in suffering and self-denial? that, though our Lord's yoke is easy, and His burden light, to such as are renewed by His Spirit, yet in itself it is very bitter, "full," as the Prophet says, "of gall and travail[b]."

[a] 1 Cor. xv. 31. [b] Lam. iii. 5.

Now such as the baptismal Cross is in the Christian life, such was circumcision among God's ancient people. It was His mark, made for life, in the very flesh, of those who belonged to Him, setting them apart, in a manner, for suffering and self-denial. It was a foretaste of the Cross; and, as such, our Saviour Himself received it. By permitting Himself, as on this day, to be brought and placed in the priest's arms, and His Sacred Flesh to be pierced, and Blood shed, by the pain which His tender infant Body now suffered, He did, as it were, offer unto His Father the first-fruits of that full harvest of suffering, which was finally to be gathered in upon the Cross. He sanctified our lesser sorrows, mortifications, and vexations, as He was afterwards to sanctify in His Agony and Passion our more grievous and heart-searching trials: our great disappointments, our shame, want, sickness, and death. Certainly, when we look at His course in this His lower world, beginning with endurance of the sharp circumcising knife, and ending with, *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* it does seem strange that we should, any of us, expect to pass through life in ease and quietness, or think it hard, if we have not our own way in all things. "[c] The disciple is not above his Master nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple, if he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord."

Thus, whether we look to our Lord's own example, or to the sacramental ways which He has ordained, both of old and now, to bring His people near Him, either way we are taught to "[d] count them happy

[c] S. Matt. x. 24, 25. [d] S. James v. 11.

which endure;" to consider affliction and trouble as God's seal, set upon those who particularly belong to Him; and to fear nothing so much, as receiving our consolation in this world.

But if this be so, then just in such measure as we are going on prosperously and at ease, have we need to mortify ourselves, and keep our passions in order; that by our own doing, if so please God, we may provide for ourselves something like that due chastening, which our afflicted brethren really have to endure. This, our self-denial, we must practise in little matters: it should accompany us in our every-day walk, as every Jew bore about with him the mark of circumcision, visibly impressed on his flesh: as every Christian was continually reminding himself, in old time, by the sign of the Cross, Whose he was, and Whom he served. We must not keep our patience and self-command, to be exercised only on great and solemn occasions: we must be continually sacrificing our own wills, as opportunity serves, to the will of others: bearing, without notice, sights and sounds that annoy us; setting about this or that task, when we had far rather be doing something very different; persevering in it often, when we are thoroughly tired of it; keeping company for duty's sake, when it would be a great joy to us to be by ourselves: besides all the trifling untoward accidents of life: bodily pain and weakness long continued, and perplexing us often when it does not amount to illness: losing what we value, missing what we desire: disappointment in other persons, wilfulness, unkindness, ingratitude, folly, in cases where we least expected it. There is no end, in short, of the many little crosses, which, if

quietly borne in a Christian way, will, by God's grace, do the work of affliction, and help to tame our proud wills by little and little.

I say, "tame our proud wills," because Holy Scripture sets forth this as one of the particular objects for which circumcision was appointed, that God's people might learn by it, not only to get over what are commonly called "the lusts of the flesh," but the angry, and envious, and proud feeling also; as the text seems especially to hint: *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.* As if stubbornness, and obstinacy, and, in one word, wilfulness, (for that is the meaning of a "stiff-neck,") were to be cured by the same kind of discipline as sensual passions, lust, and greediness. We know what power may be gained over these by duly and prudently mortifying the body. Fasting, for example, tends to cure greediness: when people are used now and then to go without anything to eat, it makes them more moderate and less particular in all their refreshments of that sort. If they can go without, much more can they content themselves with less than they would like, or with what is unpalatable to them: much more can they give up something in this and in other trifling matters, for those who are in want or in sickness. In short, it is not hard to understand how the body, which greatly affects the mind, may be tamed and brought into subjection, by a quiet and discreet method of Fasting, accompanied, of course, with Alms and Prayer.

And a little consideration will shew, that the same discipline must do great good to the passions of the soul too. We see that S. Paul reckons among the

works of the flesh, not only "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness," but also "[e]hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, envyings;" and in a word, all wilfulness. Any thing, however small, by which the Almighty uses people not to have their own way, even in respect of bodily comfort is meant by Him to keep down all these bad passions, and not our bodily appetites only. For what are all our passions, left to themselves, but so many wills of our own, set up against or besides the will of God? And if, in any one respect, we do from the heart acknowledge the goodness and reasonableness of sacrificing our will to His, how can we quite forget, that to do so is equally good and reasonable in every other respect? If we abstain from indulging our bodily appetites, for the sake of pleasing God and obtaining His grace, is there not so far a better chance of our remembering Him, when we are tempted to indulge discontented, unkind, proud thoughts, wilful tempers of any sort?

I do not, of course, mean that this benefit follows upon the mere outward exercise of fasting, but only if a person sets about it religiously, in the fear of God, in desire to draw near to Christ, and in humble obedience to His will, made known in His Gospel and by His Church. Otherwise mere fasting, as well as mere prayer, or mere reading, or mere going to Church, may be turned into a snare of the devil. But it is not therefore to be omitted, any more than those other holy exercises; but practised, as I said, in the fear of God: the want of which fear alone it is, which can ever make any person easy in depending

[e] Gal. v. 20, 21.

on one or other holy duty, so as to leave out the rest.

Therefore, as we keep under the body in order that it may the better serve the soul, so ought we very carefully to keep under the soul itself, watching and restraining, within our hearts and in our behaviour, even in our chance words, gestures and looks, every movement of the proud and wilful spirit: which indeed is the very thing which the holy Prophet means, in bidding us *circumcise the foreskin of our heart.*

Nor let us rashly imagine, that even when we are directly employed in serving God and doing our duty, we are safe against such wilfulness. Remember, we have a subtle enemy, who can transform himself into an Angel of light: who persuaded God's own people of old to think, without any manner of question, that, when they were killing God's own Apostles, they were doing God service. Certainly, in proportion as we serve God and humbly obey Him, we have a promise of protection against the snares of the Evil one: yet as long as we are in this world, we dare not expect to be *quite* safe. We are not safe in reading the Scriptures, we are not safe in Prayer, we are not safe in Almsdeeds, we are not safe in Fasting, we are not safe in Sacraments. In each and in all of these, there is room for the proud will of man to set itself up, against the pure and acceptable and perfect Will of God.

Thoughts, for example, such as these, will sometimes come into our minds, in our public and private devotions: "Might not this prayer have been put in better words? might not this service have been wiselier ordered? might not this or that rule of the Church have been more discreetly omitted?" Such

thoughts are permitted for our trial, whether, at the bottom of all our goodness, there be not some lurking seed of wilfulness: they are intended indeed for all mischief by the enemy, but God means them to be subdued by us, and so to make our crown (so be it!) surer and brighter. What are we to do with them, when they come?

If they mingle with our devotions, if they interrupt our prayers, we must of course put them down at once, as we would any other worldly disturbance.

If they make us openly disobedient to any rule of the Church, then surely they cannot be quite right: that surely is a case, in which the stiff-neck, the wilfulness of the natural man, requires to be subjected even by violence, and brought into captivity. We ought to obey God rather than man: God's plain command of humility and obedience and not giving offence, rather than the scruples and doubts of our own (perhaps) deceitful hearts: God's voice in His Church, with which He has promised to be, rather than the private opinion or example of this or that good person.

It is the neglect of this caution which has made so many heresies and schisms in the Church, so many mistaken and wrong ways of setting about God's work. They come of the carnal heart, the wilful mind: and therefore the Apostle reckons seditions and heresies amongst "the works of the flesh:" and they must be put down and guarded against in the same way as other "works of the flesh," by using to deny and distrust ourselves in the very first beginnings of every thing; no more expecting to have our own way all clear and comfortable in the service of

God, than in matters of this world; and making up our minds to obey, though we may not see all the reasons of the command.

This is good part of what Moses meant, by calling on us to *circumcise the foreskin of our heart.* Whoever will really call himself to account, how he has practised this in the year that is past, and will resolve heartily, in the fear of God, to watch and deny his will and mind, as well as his body, in the year that now begins, he will at least have begun that year well: and if he keep his vow, there are sure promises for him, that he will be nearer God at the end of the year (if he live to see it) than he now is: through Him Who, beginning this day from Circumcision and passing by the way of the Cross, is set down at the Right Hand of God.

SERMON XXI.

SHADOWS AND SUBSTANCE.

FOR THE NEW YEAR.

1 CHRON. XXIX. 15.

"*Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.*"

WHAT in the world can be plainer than this? And yet, who sees it, who thinks of it, as he ought to do? O that I could put it so clearly, so strongly, to myself and to you all, that we might lay fast hold of it with our minds, and keep it there always, by the help of God's good Spirit.

"Our days on the earth are as a shadow;" there is no reality in them, because "there is none abiding." They look like something; but in themselves they are not anything. They are always passing away; and once gone, they are gone for ever; except so far as they make a difference to the great and real Eternity, which is to come after them.

But if this be so, how very foolish are the wisest in this world, how very miserable those who think themselves happiest, if they are not really and in good earnest making that one good use of their short time, to which God Almighty invites them, and in which His good Spirit is ever ready to help them.

I will try to set it before you in a sort of parable. You know, when the wind is high, and there are clouds up in the air, how quickly the shadows of those clouds fleet over the face of the earth; how rapidly they course, as it were, one after another, up hill and down hill, as we watch from any high place. Now suppose an Angel came, and pointed to one of those clouds, and said to you, "Which had you rather, to have your own way for the short time that the shadow of yonder cloud is passing over, and then to be no more happy for the rest of your life, or to give yourself up to God, trying in earnest to be thoroughly and entirely good for that short time, and letting Him do what He will with you, and then to enter on a course of pure joy and happiness for the rest of your days? I am come to give you your choice. Which will you have, your own way whilst that cloud is fleeting on, to have misery and remorse after, as long as you live, or God's way for the few minutes, to know nothing but peace and joy afterwards?" If an Angel were sent from Heaven to give you this choice, which would you choose? You might indeed refuse to believe that it was an Angel; or, knowing that it was, you might still in a kind of madness stop your ears, and refuse to hear what message he brought. But *if* you heard and believed and attended to him, surely you would at once prefer the whole life of joy and honour, to that joy and honour which would endure only while the shadow of that one cloud was fleeting over.

See then, brethren, what we are really about, if in our plans and ways we prefer this world to the next. And yet, what are we most of us about? What have

we been about all our time hitherto, and especially since this time last year? To bring it to a point, I will ask a simple question. We have laid down to rest every night; we have either slept or we have lain awake; if we slept, our minds, so far as we are aware, were altogether taken up with idle unsubstantial things; dreams which vanished the moment we opened our eyes; but how has it been with us, while we were lying awake? Which way did our minds turn? What sort of thoughts and imaginations have for the most part taken up our hearts? The pattern of a Christian's nightly thoughts is the spouse in the Song of Solomon: "[a]By night upon my bed I sought Him, Whom my soul loveth." I lifted up my heart to my Saviour, I thought much of His Blessed Presence. But if we were not as yet able to come up to this, if our daily tasks and cares and troubles would still come thronging over our minds, in spite of ourselves; were you at least careful to remember concerning each of your doings, that there was a right and a wrong in it, and that we shall have to account to Him for which we choose? I am afraid, if we speak the truth, we must, too many of us, confess, that we went on thinking and thinking about the world, our fancies wandered from one thing to another, without recollecting God or our latter end, at all. Well then, how were we better employed, how were we at all less in a shadow, than if we had been all the while fast asleep and dreaming? The dream, we know, is all wild and unreal: it leads to nothing; as soon as we awake, we are aware how foolish and absurd and untrue it was, we quite laugh

[a] Cant. iii. 1.

at ourselves for at all believing it; if there are any who stand by and hear us talk in our sleep, they can but pity us, and think us very simple. Even so and much more, the Angels, who watch by, while we are in this vain shadow, the world, wonder how we should be so childish; and we shall ourselves wonder at it, when our inward eyes are opened by death. But as yet, (who can deny it?) great part of our life, if not the whole, has been a dream: and miserable indeed will the waking be, if we put it off till we cannot help it.

Even the very heathens knew this, and complained sadly from time to time how quickly all things here are gone. "We men," says one, "are but a dream of a shadow." And so even God's people have always felt; the afflicted and the prosperous alike. Hear what one says, who was at various times the most prosperous and the most afflicted of any person in the world. Hear the holy patriarch Job in words well known to us all; "[b] Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." The most that this earth, taken by itself, can give him of joy and happiness, is no more than a fading flower, pleasant for a short time to look at and smell to; but while you hold it in your hand, it withers and is gone. And not only the delights of man, but man himself is always changing: he, is, as I just now said, like the shadow of a cloud sweeping over: he is always fleeting and gliding on, and "never continueth in one stay."

[b] Job xiv. 1, 2.

This was Job's experience: but perhaps some one may think that Job's was a particular case; his changes and troubles were so very great. Well; listen then now to another witness: hear what *he* says, who, in all the Old Testament, seems to have had most unmixed prosperity. Solomon was not only the wisest of men, but the richest and the most honoured, and he never suffered in this life any great down-fall. And what does he tell us? "[c] Whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them: I withheld not my heart from any joy: for my heart rejoiced in all my labour. Then I looked on all the works which my hands had wrought and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

Nay, even the very labours, which they undertook for God's sake, so far as they were earthly, were unsatisfactory, and had in them something that would pass away, like the rest of the shadows of this world. Holy David, who, as much perhaps as any man, laid himself out entirely for God, had a very deep feeling of this. He expresses it over and over in the Psalms. "[d] Man is like a thing of nought, his time passeth away like a shadow." "[e] I go hence like the shadow that departeth." [f] My days are gone like a shadow, and I am withered like grass." And here in the Chronicles, when he had just succeeded in providing for the building of God's Temple, one of the very best of works, in the most perfect manner, see how sadly he yet humbles himself, in the feeling of his and all men's imperfection. "We are strangers

[c] Eccl. ii. 10, 11. [d] Ps. cxliv. 4. [e] Ib. cix. 22. [f] Ib. cii. 11.

before Thee and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding." As if he should say, "Though we did our best before Thee, in this or in any other good work, still it is all less than nothing and vanity, unless Thou accept it, and treasure it up with Thyself, giving it, in some sort, a portion of Thine own Eternity."

And not only was this the case with good men under the Law, but even after our Saviour came, as heaven's gates were thrown open, and the knowledge of Eternal things was more abundantly given, they did but feel the more deeply, how very short and worthless is the life of this world. S. James puts it all in one word[g]. He blames those who said, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a place, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not, what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that continueth a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Thus you see, that all through human life and from beginning to end of the Bible, we are taught that all earthly things are a dream and a shadow; and that to set our hearts on any of them is about as wise, as what children do, when they reach after a rainbow and cry because they cannot lay hold of it. While we are troubling ourselves about it, it is gone for ever.

Still, if this world were really all, if we knew for certain that there was nothing to come after, no souls to be saved or lost, no account at all to be given, it

[g] S. James iv. 13, 14.

might not be so much amiss our interesting ourselves in these shadows, and finding amusement in them just to pass away the time. If there be no resurrection of the dead, "[h] let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." If there were no substance, it might be well enough for us to go on playing while we may, with these shadows.

But as it is, what can we say for ourselves? We are not more sure of these being shadows, than we are of realities to come after them. The same word which tells us, It is appointed unto us once to die, tells us also, that after death shall be judgement[i]. The same word which says, "Our days here are but as a shadow," tells us no less plainly, that there is another and a true life; life eternal for the just; fire everlasting for the wicked. We and our fathers have found it all true in what it says of this world; they also, no doubt, (it is an aweful thing to think of) have found it all true in what it says of the other world: and so shall we, in a very short time. The shadows will be over, and either the True Saving Light, or the fearful glare of the unquenchable burnings will be all around us from that time, and we shall be quite sure of their never departing; quite as sure as we are now, that whatever delights us belonging to this world, be it innocent, or be it sinful, will very soon vanish like a dream.

Is not all this true, every word of it, true and undeniable? There is not one of us all, I feel sure, who, if I could ask him apart (and God knows how soon he may be laid on his sick bed, and I may have to ask him)—there is not one, who durst deny what

[h] 1 Cor. xv. 32. [i] Heb. ix. 27.

the Bible teaches of the difference between this life and the other. We all know it; we all confess it; many of us are ready enough to put others in mind of it. What then can we say for ourselves, that we are so much taken up with that, which we know can only last but a short time: so hardly induced to take any trouble to put ourselves at all out of the way, for that which we know must abide for ever?

If any rich person had promised faithfully to give a little money to every one who should come here and behave himself decently on Sunday, no doubt it would be a great inducement to many to come, they would not then make so much of every little difficulty: they would not please themselves so much with sitting quietly at home, and wondering, perhaps with a little scorn, sometimes it may be even with anger, at those who make a point of being here whenever they can. They would say, Of course such a man goes, he gets a shilling or a half-crown by it: but now it would seem to them very strange to say, "of course he goes, for he has a soul to save, and he trusts that going to Church will help him to save it." There would be no need in such a case for the priests to urge and press the people, and answer their excuses, and contrive how they might come. They would be ready enough to contrive all that for themselves. It comes to this, in short; whatever men say, whatever they imagine themselves to believe, they care more about that small sum of money, than they care for pleasing God, and going to heaven.

Now, consider this in earnest, I beseech you; put your minds to it. Is this a safe condition, a safe temper of mind, to die in? Would you willingly

go and stand before God to be judged, while you have yet so little love and faith, as to care more for a small sum of money, than for the privilege of serving Christ regularly in His own appointed place?

I know of a Christian parish, in which it has been the custom now for a long time to begin the New Year with a very early service. It is a small country parish, containing, I suppose, two hundred and fifty or three hundred people: and to-morrow morning at six o'clock, or earlier, I dare say, that Church will be lighted up for full service, and the Holy Communion will be administered to as many as fifty or sixty communicants. Now, what is our feeling, when we hear of such a thing as this? I fear there is something in many of us, which would cause us to draw back from the thought, as from something very strange, unreal, and uncomfortable. On the other hand, it does not seem to us at all strange, uncomfortable or unreal, when we hear of persons, beginning the New Year with music and feasting, with in-door or out-door sports, or with some promising experiment in the way of business. That is to say, we are so used to live in shadows, and treat them as if they would last, that we are amazed, and startled, and almost offended, when we see others neglecting shadows, and reaching with all the might of their souls after that which is real and true.

As in this matter of going to Church, so in other parts of our duty, it is not hard for each one, if he will, to try himself, whether he is caring more for the shadow or for the substance. Christ has said, "[h] Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven;" lay

[h] S. Matt. vi. 20.

up alms in your storehouses. You know best, whether in this past year you have been providing this real treasure; or have been merely toiling after a dream of riches, a little more money than you had. Christ has said, Deny yourselves; Turn away your "eyes, lest they behold vanity[i]"; so, when you die, you shall see God as He is. Your own consciences can tell you, and it is written in God's Book, whether you have watched yourself in this respect during these months that are over, whether you have preferred seeing the King in His Eternal Beauty, or have been content to amuse yourself for a little while with that, which fades as the flower of the field.

And so in regard of all other parts of your duty. A very little patient self-examination will very soon begin to shew you, how you really stand. Enter, I beseech you, in good earnest on that work, how painful and difficult soever it may seem. Now at least, at this sacred and aweful time, whilst our Lord by His Feast of Christmas is present, we trust, among us, let us pause and consider: let us look backward and forward. What is become of the old year? of all its days, weeks, and months? What is become of it? Where is it gone? Where are all its earthly pleasures, even those which were most blameless and innocent? All are gone; they can never, never return. We have left them behind, while we ourselves are speeding onward and onward, farther and farther, into the great deep of Eternity. All are gone for ever; we know they are gone; we feel now, that all were shadows; yet while they lasted, they seemed to us just as substantial, we

[i] Ps. cxix. 37.

were just as much engrossed by them, as by any thing that most occupies our attention now. Bye and bye, we shall feel, and not only confess, that these things too are shadows. O let us be wise in time; let us begin to deal with things now, as we know they ought to be dealt with, and as we shall bye and bye wish that we had dealt with them!

Some of your friends, it may be, have died since this time last year: they are waked out of their sleep; they walk "no more in a vain shadow:" to them all dreams are over, and nothing but aweful realities are around them. Imagine yourself asking one of them, how the world and worldly things appear, now they look back upon them. One, it may be, is on the Right Hand; he is waiting, in assured hope, for the great Absolution: he will tell you, "These to which I am called, are the only true joys; all the rest is gone for ever, and you are called to them as well as I. O how foolish will it seem to you bye and bye, to have lost one day or one hour of them for any thing in that world of shadows!"

Another, unhappy! will be on the left Hand; and no doubt he would warn you, if he could, as the Rich Man would have warned his five brethren; "Trust not your purple and fine linen; care not for your daily sumptuous fare; seek not to receive your good things in that first life! you will find them all shadows in the end, nothing in them real and abiding, but the sting and the curse." Thus would they preach to you, if they could, from their place of torment. Would *that*, all be lost upon you?

What should you say, yourself, were the messenger of death even now to knock at your door, and say,

"In half an hour you must be ready to go with me?" What would you not *then* give for some few of the half-hours, which you have cast away in hunting after shadows? And if such be your thoughts before death, how will it all be after death! Every thing here will seem less than nothing; everything there, immense and infinite. You know it for certain. O that you would consider it, and begin to take care of your soul accordingly, and go on steadily, that when the next New Year shall dawn, whether you be in earth or Paradise, it may find you far better than you are now, and your Lord and His Angels rejoicing over you!

SERMON XXII.

THE ETERNAL NEW YEAR.

FOR THE NEW YEAR.

2 S. Pet. iii. 14, 15.

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation."

What are the things which the Apostle says we all are of course looking for? The fearful circumstances which are to come upon us at the end of all things, the great Day of the Lord, such as they had been described a few verses before: that as "the old world," in the time of Noah, "being overflowed with water, perished," so "the heavens and the earth which are now, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men:" and that "the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up:" finally, that to us there will be, according to our Lord's promise, "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." "These," says the Apostle, "are

the things which we look for:" we know very well that matters have not always gone on as they do, nor will hereafter always continue to do so; we know that all things, while we live, are perpetually changing round us, or seeming to change; and that we must each of us, before long, undergo the greatest change, Death.

There is not one of us who is ignorant of these things; we have been bred up in the expectation of them; they are quite familiar to us. Indeed, they are but too familiar: for because we have been told of them so often, and seen so much of them, we are apt, some of us, to slight even God's own instructions concerning these things; we imagine it may be very well for unlearned people to be so warned over and over, but as for ourselves, we do not think we need it; we seem to know it all very well already.

And yet all the while, even when we are saying the words of our faith, we can hardly be said really to know and believe it; to do that, we must first be sincerely practising it, or, at least, sincerely desiring to do so. We talk about the end of all things; but what is it more than talk, if we set our hearts upon money, or any enjoyment of this world, as though it would last for ever? Men speak, as knowing that the heavens and the earth, which now are, will perish very suddenly, without any notice thereof; they are so well aware of this, that they very soon made it into a proverb: the "Day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night." We say this and many more such things; but do we really believe them? If we did, could we possibly be contented to do any thing displeasing to Him, Who may come into sight the next

moment? and woe is unto us, if He find us with the stain of our evil deeds unrepented of!

Here we are come, by His especial mercy, to the end of another year. While many of our brethren and acquaintance, of whom we cannot say that they were in God's sight worse and unworthier than ourselves, have been taken away, and their time of trial shortened, He has still continued to us the time of repentance and amendment. We are not yet lying on the bed of sickness, our hearts struck down and bewildered with pain and fear, with the burden of the sins of many years, like a dead weight, upon our souls, wishing perhaps to repent, but not knowing how. We are not yet in this sad condition; but who knows how soon we may be? Any one who shall slight the warnings which God's good Providence may visit him with this very day, this very hour, in this very Church,—who knows how soon he may be struck down, lying helpless upon his bed, tossing about with pain and anguish, unable to think or wish distinctly at all, or wishing in vain for this hour, for one hour of health again, that he may repent and turn to God effectually?

We cannot, indeed we cannot, my brethren, know ourselves, how sinful and careless we have been, without examining ourselves much oftener and in a far more searching way, than we are most of us used to practise.

For an instance of what I mean, let us now ask ourselves, as in the Presence of Him Whom we cannot deceive, How many times, in the year which is just over, have we seriously had in our thoughts the Great Day, which we all profess to look for?

We know how it startles us, if we suddenly wake up in the night, and fancy we hear any one in the house. How often have we pictured to ourselves the unspeakable fear and amaze of that last midnight, when He will come as a thief, without warning, without chance of escape, without possibility of our putting Him off any longer?

We know what a very powerful and fearful thing, in the way of God's judgements, fire is, and what care we are obliged to take daily, lest fearful and sad accidents befall us through it. How many days, in this last year, have we represented to ourselves that final Fire, when the world will burn under our feet; our treasures, our hopes, our delights, our wonders, all sinking, one after another, in the flame that will burn up all; and we ourselves after them, except we have taken warning in time? We are on the edge of this Fire; it may break out any moment under us and around us: how many times have we remembered it this last year? how many sins has the remembrance of it kept us from? how many thoughts has it caused us to have of the vanity of this present world, and the danger of setting our hearts upon it?

Too often, it may be, when such thoughts have arisen, in this or in former years, we have quieted them for the time with some blind notion, that as the world has lasted so long, no doubt it will last some time longer; that as God has still continued to us and other sinners life and opportunity of repentance, so we may expect Him to go on sparing us still longer. This is the very deceit of the Evil one: God forbid we should ever fall into it! It is, in fact, the first beginning of such unbelieving talk as S. Peter de-

scribes, where he says, there would be "mockers in the last times, walking after their own ungodly lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." So, in our wicked and careless moods, we say to ourselves, "Where are the threatenings of His anger? it has not yet come upon us, and we will sin on yet a while, in hopes that we shall live to repent, or that He will be more merciful than His word says, or that in some other way punishment will not overtake us."

May Almighty God teach us His fear, that we may give up for ever all such profane thoughts, and sincerely consider that God cannot lie: He "is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness;" He does not, as certain weak sinners imagine, grow slack and careless concerning His word spoken, as if He forgot it, and had ceased to care whether we attended to it or no: but "He is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." He waits long, as the Angel waited with his sword drawn in his hand and stretched out over Jerusalem, to see if men will humble themselves, and turn from their evil ways, accepting patiently the punishment of their iniquity. It is not that either He or His dreadful judgements are far off; but as He fills heaven and earth, and is always quite close to us, though entirely out of our sight; so the fire of His wrath, the sea of flames which shall consume the world one day, is every day ready to break out, every day close at hand, only kept back by Him in His Mercy, until our day be quite over and His day begin.

Of all things, let us beware, that we abuse not this His longsuffering, and make it an occasion of going on in sin. Nothing so sure to bring on us an increase of punishment, a manifold scourge hereafter. We may judge of this by what we feel in ourselves. When are people so angry, so sure to punish an offender severely, as when they see that he has been offending in wilful scorn of them, and in mockery of their good nature, which had passed over former offences?

On the other hand, see what a blessing appears, in the midst of these aweful threatenings, for such as are wise, and either keep their vows, or repent and amend before it is too late. While the world and all things therein are melting from under the feet of the wicked, "We," says the Apostle, "according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." As Noah saw the world in greenness and beauty, coming out of the confusion and desolation in which the Flood had left it, so faithful Christians shall see a new world come forth, in glory and blessedness unspeakable, after the fires of the last Day; a world where there will be no more death, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things will be passed away [a]. It will be a world pure, and holy, and undefiled: righteousness will dwell there and true holiness. There will be no more care: among the many children of Adam that shall be there, the effects of Adam's sin will be entirely done away. There will be no more shrinking, no more hiding ourselves from the presence of Almighty God: His Throne and the

[a] Rev. xxi. 4.

Throne of His Son will be there, and "[b] His servants shall serve Him:" their happiness will be to see His Face, and to know that "His Name is written in their foreheads," that He loves to account them His own, and will do so for ever.

These, my Christian friends and brethren, are the things that S. Peter says we know before; fear and love, life and death, blessing and cursing: first, the wicked world perishing in the fires of the wrath of God, then a righteous and holy and glorious world ensuing, the perfection of that kingdom of Heaven, of which we began to be made partakers in our Baptism. Of these two things, all the great changes, which take place in our sight continually, regarding the things of this lower world, are so many figures, and shadows, and pledges. Especially it seems natural, that the coming of a new year should put us in mind of these things, and assure us more and more of them.

When we look back on the old year, how completely it is gone for ever, how impossible that the smallest moment of it should return again to all eternity; will not this help us to imagine, what sort of a glance we shall throw back on our whole course in this world, when we are at last come to the other? How strange will it then seem to us, that any thing so utterly short-lived and worthless should at all have won away our hearts from the things eternal! When we look forward to the new year, how much there seems for us to think of and provide for; how many hopes, plans, expectations, purposes of doing better in various ways than ever we have yet done! This is a token

[b] Rev. xxii. 3, 4.

from God to us, that He has prepared for us an Eternal New Year, in which none of our hopes will be disappointed, nor our plans come to nought, nor any of our purposes fail of the best fruit.

We look back to the seasons of the last year, we remember the bright days of its spring, the glow and fragrance of its summer, the joyfulness and plenty of its autumn, and we think sadly how all has passed away. Its leaves and its flowers are gone, and its fruit will very soon follow; and this tells us, in a way which we cannot help understanding, of the approaching fate of the very world itself, wherein the most innocent things are so frail and transitory.

But again we look forward: we see the buds prepared on the trees; the seed, we know, is in the ground, and in many cases it has already begun to shew itself: the days are again beginning to lengthen, and we are encouraged a thousand ways to look on to another year, and to imagine how delightful it will be, to watch the spring and summer coming again. All these are so many shadows of the calm, sure, unspeakable joy of heart, which Christ's true and loyal servants feel, when they look in hope beyond the Judgement-day, and picture to themselves the new heaven and the new earth: the pure River of the Water of Life, and on either side of it the Tree of Life; green pastures and waters of comfort, not for a time, but for ever.

Or we may look at the Old and the New Year in rather a different way; not so much with respect to the earth and the seasons, as with respect to our own hopes and fortunes, our own decay or success in life. Whoever we are, and whatever our line of life, we

probably had some hopes, some notions or purposes in our minds, this time last year, which have now departed for ever, and perhaps by this time we wonder that we ever entertained them. We, it is likely, began the year, dreaming of this or that gain, or pleasure, or work, the attainment of which, we now see, was clearly impossible for us; or, if possible, yet more likely to do us harm than good. This may well set us upon considering, how all our worldly schemes, all our frail human plans, for doing good even and serving God, will fail in that Day, unable to abide "[c]the fire" which will "try every man's work." Our human plans will fail; but our Divine plans, the counsels for doing good, which we may have pursued with single hearts and in strict obedience to the Lord and His Church; these, by the mercy of God, will endure that flame; they will be as gold, and silver, and precious stones; Christ our Lord will wash them in His own Blood, and offer them as a precious gift to His Father; and what He, the great High Priest, offers, will surely be dear and acceptable in God's sight.

If we have any plans and hopes (as who has not?) for the year which is now beginning, let us before all things see to it, that they be such as we dare recommend to God in prayer, and seriously beg His blessing upon them: if they will not bear being thought of in His Presence, if they will not bear being mentioned to Him, they must be evil, and had better be put by at once.

However, supposing them to be good and innocent, our having such thoughts in our minds is a kind of

[c] 1 Cor. iii. 13.

perpetual hint from Him Who reads our hearts, that He would have us look far onwards, and lay our plans for Eternity. It is His secret whisper, inviting us to lay up treasures, not in earth, where is corruption and robbery, but "[d] in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor do thieves break through nor steal."

Once more: if it sadden and humble us, as well it may, to look back on our vows and good intentions, which seemed last year so fresh and pure, and so soon (too many of them) passed away as in a dream; and if our hearts well-nigh fail us to think, What if, bye and bye, when the world has passed quite away, *all* our vows and good purposes shall have passed as fruitlessly with it? Yet have we this great ground of hope and comfort, that God, All-pitying, has yet spared us; that He has not cast us away as we deserved; that we see the beginning of another year; we are again invited to humble ourselves for the sad defects of the years that are past, and to offer to our Crucified Lord, on our knees, our solemn promises, in Church and at home, of true amendment, and strict watchfulness for the future.

Only let us see to it, that our holy vows and promises keep possession of our minds, that we forget them not when temptation comes near. Here, again, we may take a lesson from the outward course of the world, from the changes of the seasons. As yet they vary, and have their rounds: but a time we know will soon come, when those changes will be at an end. "[e] The sun shall then no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw itself:" it shall be "[f] one

[d] S. Matt. vi. 20. [e] Isa. lx. 20. [f] Zech. xiv. 7.

day, known to the Lord." So let our resolutions, before too often broken, now at length become fixed, our prayers attended to, our rules put in practice, our struggles with temptation courageous. Let us, settle it in our hearts, every morning, to remember all that day that Christ is present in our hearts and bodies, and that to indulge evil thoughts is affronting Him to His Face. Every evening let us particularly examine ourselves, how we have kept this rule. Thus, although we must expect abundance of infirmity, He will mortify all wilful sin in us. Thus only may our New year be happy, and our Lord's longsuffering be glorified by our salvation.

SERMON XXIII.

CONVERSION.

FOR THE NEW YEAR.

Isa. xxxi. 6.

"Turn ye unto Him, from Whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted."

Turn ye—be converted—that is God's word by His Prophets—not by one Prophet only, but by all. Those who have used their Bibles in earnest, cannot fail to have noticed the word. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God—and not that he should return from his ways and live? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God—therefore turn yourselves and live." So speaks, over and over, the Prophet Ezekiel[a]: and the other Prophets in turn take up the word. "[b]O Israel, return unto the Lord; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." "[c]Return unto Me, and I will return unto

[a] Ezek. xxxiii. 11. xviii. 23, 31, 32.

[b] Hos. xiv. 1.

[c] Mal. iii. 7.

you." "[d] Turn ye even to Me with your whole heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning." "[e] Turn ye even unto Me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts." These are but a very few out of the many places, where conversion,—turning to God,—is insisted upon as the one thing needful. At all times it is needful; we must never forget it: and this is a time especially for thinking much about it. For the New Year is of course a season of turning, a season of conversion. The Lord of heaven and earth, of the sun and stars, of the air and sea, puts us in mind, by the very change of seasons, what changes are needful for our good. The sun at this time begins to rise higher in the heavens, and to make preparations for the brightness and blessings of summer; an image of Him Who was even now Incarnate and born, and became Emmanuel, "God with us;" and the days begin to grow longer, and all our works seem to come freshly upon us, calling on us everyone to be diligent and earnest in doing our best. We look back upon the last year, and are ashamed of the little **we** have done: we look forward through the coming year, and feel how quickly it is already passing away, and what a strong call there is upon us to do better than in times passed. We make up our accounts, and it reminds us of the Great Day. Every thing, both in the course of the seasons, and in the business of life, may well come at this time to a thoughtful person as a kind of parable, teaching this one lesson, "Return unto the Lord, for He is returning unto you."

Conversion, I say, is that which our Lord requires

[d] Joel ii. 12. [e] Zech. i. 3.

of us. And what is conversion? It is simply turning to God: turning away from this present world, and from the things which naturally draw us toward them, and turning towards Eternity and Him Who is Eternal. It is turning from earth to Heaven, from the flesh to the Spirit, from our enemy to our Saviour. Or if you would know of it more distinctly, it is becoming like little children, for so our Lord expressly said: "[f]Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven." It is absolutely necessary; no one can be saved without it. All who are to obtain God's eternal blessing, must be converted and become as little children. As little children trust in their parents, cling to them, care for them as for none other, and cannot be happy without them, so must we be minded towards our Father in heaven: and when we are so minded, then, and not till then, shall we be (as our Lord said) fit for the Kingdom of God. Conversion then is needful for all. For all are by nature very far gone from this child-like mind towards God, very unwilling to trust Him, obey Him, give up all for Him. Conversion is necessary for all; and no persons, not even those who are most improved by God's all-merciful grace, are at all perfect in this love and humility. All need conversion; but not all just in the same way. I beg you to attend to this, for it may help, by God's blessing, to guard you against some mistakes which are common, and very dangerous. All need conversion, but not all just in the same way. I will put three several cases, which will help you to

[f] S. Matt. xviii. 3.

understand the kind of difference I mean. A great portion of mankind is, and always has been, heathens and Jews; not knowing, not believing the Lord Jesus at all. Others, though they know and own Jesus Christ, are living in some grievous sin, or in sad forgetfulness of Him, and of their own souls: which forgetfulness is indeed itself one of the most grievous of all sins. A third sort again, knowing and owning Christ, and not denying Him by known and deadly sin, are yet, alas! more or less worldly and lukewarm, and have great need of an hearty and effectual change, which shall lift them by His grace nearer to Him than now they are. The best of us cannot surely imagine himself in a higher condition than this.

Now it is plain, that all these three sorts stand in need of conversion. As for open heathens and Jews all persons agree that they must needs be converted. To be saved as Christians, they must become Christians: they must be converted as Saul was. But this, you will say, is no case of ours. We are Christians long ago, baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, believing the Creed and saying the Lord's Prayer. We are not open heathens or Jews, to be converted as S. Paul was. And it is true, my brethren, we do not need such conversion as S. Paul's; we were by God's electing mercy born in a Christian and not in a heathen country; the Kingdom of Heaven came to us as a treasure hid in a field, without our looking for it. So much the more earnest ought we to be in seeing to it, that we lose not our conversion in the ways in which we do need it. For conversion, as I

said, is the turning of the whole heart towards God: and there are others besides open unbelievers, who have great need of this; no one will doubt, that it is needed by all who, "professing and calling themselves Christians," yet live in deadly sin. David, e.g. so long as he went on in his sad fall unrepented of —what though he still worshipped the Lord, still believed in Him, and perhaps had pleasure, real and manifold pleasure, in religious services—yet his heart was in fact secretly turned away from his Maker; there was something which he loved for the time better than God: and he, as much, or more than any heathen, had need to pray "[s]Make me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Now if David, being in grievous sin, needed conversion, surely Christians in grievous sin need it, not less, but more, than he. For sad as David's fall was, he had not yet been made a member of Christ and a child of God, as each one of us has; therefore our wilful sins are worse than his, and put us for the time in a worse state, and turn us farther away from God. What an aweful thought is this, my brethren, for all among us, alas! too many! who are living in any notorious sin, or at any time have been so; in uncleanness, e.g. or in theft, or in spite and uncharitableness. They are worse than David was in that sad time of his fall. To them indeed Holy Scripture cries aloud at this time of the New Year, and spares not, "O turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." Lose no more time, trifle no more with your precious souls, do no longer this despight unto the Spirit of grace. What is there in this ill-gotten

[s] Ps. li. 10.

money; this dark and evil pleasure; this praise of foolish men, to make it worth your while to stay away from your God, to turn your back on your Saviour, to forfeit your place in Heaven? Think how fearful it would be, should the next New Year find you in another world, with your face turned the same way as now—towards sin and away from God. There will not, there cannot, be any conversion after that. Neither say, "I am converted already, I delight at times in God and in good things: I love to attend holy services, to hear affecting sermons, to read and hear of devout and charitable doings: and, if I do sometimes give way to bad habits and carnal desires, I always hate myself for it afterwards—I know I am not so good as I should be: still I hope I am not unconverted." I beseech you, brethren, take heed of this way of thinking; it is very very deceitful and dangerous. It is making out God, the All-holy God, "to be even such an one as ourselves," not hating sin so very much;—not counting it too bad to come near Him. It is the temper, which S. Jude describes in some of the most aweful words of the Bible, where he speaks of some, who continuing in their lusts, yet come to God's feast of love, "[h]feeding themselves without fear." May the good and merciful God keep us all, both you and me, from ever being of the number of these! Or if we have ever been such, may He enable us to spend the whole remainder of our lives in deep repentance for so fearful a fall! To spend our whole after lives in true contrition of heart, as well as in amendment of behaviour,—that is the conversion, the turning

[h] S. Jude 12.

to Him, which our Lord expects from us Christians, if we have unhappily fallen into grievous sin, or into anything like settled forgetfulness of Him, though it be not accompanied with open or direct breach of any one of the Ten Commandments.

And further, God expects conversion also in all, who may be properly called backsliders; all who are in a way to be worldly and lukewarm; all who are going backward instead of forward, though they may not be clearly out of the way to Heaven. Their faces are now the wrong way, towards the world; and their backs towards their God. He demands of them to turn round and look towards Him, look steadily, and more steadily; and this too is conversion, though not just like the other two cases, yet it is a real conversion, a real turning "from the power of Satan to God." For instance: you are not going on, we will suppose, in any shameful and scandalous way; you are honest, sober, chaste, diligent, kind; your life is ordered on the whole by good and religious rules; but perhaps, if you examined yourself *very* carefully, you would find that your worldly business or employment, or something connected with it, is getting too fast hold of you; you cannot pray, for thinking of it, so well as you could some time since: or you are getting into a way of minding too much, what others say concerning you, whether in the way of praise or blame: or in some other way—there is no end of them—things worldly and temporal are working themselves into too high place in your heart; you are in a way to care for them more than for things eternal and heavenly. Well then you too, although you are neither a heathen

nor scandalously wicked—yet you too have need of conversion. You need to long and pray and strive, that God would turn your face toward Sion and not towards Babylon; upward towards Him, not downward toward His enemy. You too must cry out with the whole Church in Lent, "Turn Thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned." You too, whenever you stand by a grave, may well take up the prayer appointed, and say, "We meekly beseech Thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness."

One way or another, then, it appears, we all need to pray for conversion; for even if we are not in direct and mortal sin, still we are in some way, more or less, drawn downwards or aside. And as God invites us to pray that we may be turned—for He puts the prayer repeatedly in our mouths, and it is great part of His meaning when He teaches us to say, "Thy kingdom come," so we may well beg of Him this grace of conversion as a New Year's gift. And He will not deny it, if we seek it in earnest. If He meant to deny the grace needful for us to turn to Him, He would not so continually call on us to do so. E. g. consider those words of Isaiah which I read to you in the text, "Turn ye to Him from Whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted." It is plain that those whom He is speaking to might turn to Him, by His help, if they would; else He would not so call on them. And to whom is He speaking? To Hezekiah and the children of Israel. *They* needed *some* conversion for He bids them turn to Him. *Which* kind of conversion did they need? Not the first, from mere heathenism; for they were

not mere heathens. The Assyrians might need that, had they been called upon, but so did not Hezekiah and his people. Neither does it appear, that that good king and his subjects had been guilty of any special sin, as the ten tribes, here called the children of Israel, had been, deeply revolting from God, making to themselves golden calves, and worshipping them. Judah, in Hezekiah's time, was not so sinning: and therefore needed not, so far, the grace of conversion. Yet still you see Judah is called on to turn unto the Lord. How could Hezekiah and Judah be converted? Not as heathens, not so much as deadly sinners, but as lukewarm, backsliding, imperfect servants of God. How were they backsliding? In this especially, that they had begun to put their trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen. This was, so far, going back to the world and away from God; and therefore it required a turning; it required conversion: they must dismiss the thought of Egypt, strong as that kingdom was, altogether out of their minds, and they must think of God only, as of their Rock.

But now mark the reason alleged, why Hezekiah and Judah should thus turn to God. It was because Israel had revolted from Him, "Turn ye unto Him from Whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted." As if He should say, The more Israel has revolted, the more turn ye towards Him. The great sin of the ten tribes, their deep revolt, their incurable idolatry is mentioned as something which might help to rouse the two tribes against the lukewarmness and worldly trust, to which they were too much inclined. This is very instructive, if we will consider it. We

are too apt to think that if we are not so bad to look at as some others—if they are clearly in deadly sin, and we seem only partial backsliders, we need not so much mind, we need no such anxious conversion. This may be a snare to some, at times like this, in making up their spiritual accounts. But consider the thing seriously, brethren; you are tempted perhaps to say to yourself, "To be sure I cannot say that I have improved this last year: on the contrary I fear that the cares and pleasures of the world take up more of my mind and heart than they did: still I do not seem to myself to need conversion—I am not conscious of any great wilful sin, such as I see others continually falling into." Would it not be well for you then to go on and think further to yourself, "But if these others have fallen, too surely I know that in me too there is frailty, I too am in great danger of falling? And they did not fall at once: they began by what seemed trifling liberties, which they took, in consequence of their putting too much trust in themselves. And after all even their direct sins may not be so bad in God's sight, as my lukewarmness and worldly mind. Therefore, please God, I will not be highminded, but fear." Would not this way of thinking be much better and safer and in the end more comfortable too, than when we allow ourselves to go gaily on, as if we were sure we were good enough? O, think again, think seriously, remember, Who is taking account of your thoughts. O, surely, we have, one and all, great need to pray for a thorough conversion of heart, if not from open sin, yet from sinful coldness and imperfection.

Mind, I say, we have need to *be* converted; I do not say we have need of the *feeling* that we are so. *That* is another matter, with which we have little to do except to strive and pray that we may not deceive ourselves about it. Let us only ask for so much comfort and assurance, as He knows may most help us to *do* what will please Him. For the rest, let us not fear to put our whole trust in Him, this year and all the years of our life.

SERMON XXIV.

RETURNING TO GOD.

FOR THE NEW YEAR.

MAL. iii. 7.

"Return unto Me, and I will return unto you; saith the Lord of Hosts. But ye say, Wherein shall we return?"

THIS is one of those verses which shew most clearly and graciously the forethought of our heavenly Teacher, in providing for us the Old Testament; first, in that words, spoken on a particular occasion to the Jews, are made to convey a heavenly warning and message to Christians, of all generations, at all times. Secondly, in that Almighty God here, as in many other places, furnishes comfort and instruction beforehand to that bitterest of cares and doubts, the care and doubt which must hang over those, who feel that they have grieved His Spirit, received in Baptism, by wilful sin, and having been partakers of the heavenly gift, have fallen away, and trodden Christ, His grace, His warnings, His example, under foot.

I say, these words of the prophet Malachi may with advantage be considered, as shewing forth God's love for His people in both these ways. As to the particular occasion on which they were spoken, it is

easy to make that out, on comparing this prophecy of Malachi with the historical Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, written about the same time; and also from the prophecy of Haggai. It is plain, there were bad seasons; they suffered from drought, and blasting, and mildew, and from the dearth which came on in consequence: and they were tempted, under colour of their distress, to break the law of God in several ways. Some of them exacted usury and increase of their brethren, who came to borrow money of them; some even sold them for slaves; others withdrew the Levites' portion, or defrauded God of His tithe; and it is to these more particularly, that the prophet Malachi speaks in the text. "Even from the days of your fathers," saith God by him, "ye have gone away from Mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto Me, and I will return unto you; saith the Lord of Hosts. But ye say, Wherein shall we return?"

As if He had said, Though you have left off worshipping other gods, and are therefore inclined to think yourselves better than your fathers, yet your conduct shews too clearly that you are their children, partakers of their profane heart. And whereas you are apt to say, Wherein have we gone astray? I will tell you. You have done that, which one would hardly have thought possible, for a creature to rob his Creator. "Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed Me?" Here again they would say in their perverseness, "Wherein have we robbed Thee?" God therefore again prevents them, telling them it was in tithes and offerings: and the sin had gone very far; it was not one or two of them that had

been guilty of it, but even that whole nation. And having told them their fault, He answers their other question, how they should amend it, and return unto God. "Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Here then we see that, on that special occasion of a famine among the Jews, to punish them for withdrawing God's tithes; a matter which one would have thought had little enough to do with us Christians, so long after, and many of us not at all concerned with tithes in any way; in such a matter the heavenly Teacher has laid down a general law of His dealing with all sinners in all times. "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you." You who are My own people have gone astray like your fathers: you have committed deadly sin; you have robbed God; you are cursed with a curse; yet is not your case hopeless. You are like persons wrecked in the deep sea; yet is there a plank for you to save yourselves upon; true, earnest, bitter, continual repentance, and turning again to God. Do so in earnest, and He will turn again to you. "Turn ye unto Him from Whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted." "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" "Turn ye, even to Me, saith the Lord, with your whole heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God."

These gracious invitations, taken from sundry prophets, (and there are many, many more of them,) are so many reasons for hope and consolation to those Christians,—alas! how many, who have stained the covenant of their God with wilful, habitual, customary sin. The Old Testament is in this sense even more comfortable than the New. For the blessed promises and invitations of the New Testament are most of them plainly addressed to such as have not yet been made members of Christ; whereas the Catechism teaches, that we all have been made members of Him by Holy Baptism. The New Testament, except in a few instances, does not plainly or expressly speak of pardon, for those who have grieved the Spirit that sealed them. So much the more consoling is it to a thoughtful and contrite spirit, to find God so continually offering to His ancient people pardon and favour on their true repentance, however grievously they had broken His covenant. For His people, the Jews, were, as S. Paul says, an ensample, a pattern, type, or figure, of us; and His dealings with their nation are tokens of the manner in which He will deal with those, in whom personally He dwells by His Spirit. Therefore, when we meet with such promises as this in the text, "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you," we have very great encouragement to believe, that they are intended for us backsliding Christians; that if we presently, heartily, and deeply repent, then, whatever anguish of mind, or other suffering, we may have to go through before we come to the end, yet ours will not be an end unblessed; we may hope, through the merits and mercy of Him, Who will come to be our Judge,

not to be cast out of the Kingdom of Heaven, though we may not be more than the very least in it. Such is the refreshing and soothing, yet humbling, view of things, which we gain on comparing the aweful sayings of the New Testament, concerning those who abuse God's grace, with the merciful tokens and intimations in the Old, that His people were pardonable on true repentance, even after grievous sin.

Now, who that thinks at all seriously of another world, can help thinking of his need of repentance, now at the beginning of a new year? Not to speak now of those, who have fallen, during the past twelvemonth, into what all know to be great and deadly sin, such as uncleanness, theft, neglect of God's worship, drunkenness, loving and making lies; who is so clear from doing what he ought not, and from leaving undone what he ought, as not to tremble, when he recollects that the great Day is so much nearer at hand? Who then can be other than most thankful for such mild and merciful sayings, as "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you?" Who that knows any thing of the sad desolation of heart, when conscience tells us that we are in wilful sin, that the Holy Spirit must therefore be withdrawing Himself from us, that there is a cloud between us and the throne of grace, which intercepts our prayers:—(for it is written, "[a]if I incline unto wickedness with mine heart, the Lord will not hear me:")—who that knows any thing of the bitterness of such thoughts as these, mingling with all the enjoyments of life, and casting a blight over the very kindness of our friends, making us feel unworthy of it all: what Christian, I say, that knows anything of a wounded

[a] Ps. lxvi. 16.

conscience, can help welcoming with unspeakable gratitude such openings and gleams of hope, so graciously permitted to appear, even to such as he is, in the Heaven which his own sins have clouded over to him? Who, being such, can think enough even of that one single blessing, that God's Providence yet allows him to use the Psalms in worship, and make their words his own? When, for example, he meets with the words, "[d] Create in me a contrite heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me; cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me:" does not the thought come over him with a healing power, that if he were utterly cast off, as he deserves to be, God would not have put these words into his mouth, nor have invited him by His Providence so to speak to Him in prayer? And will not this encourage him to bear with a willing heart whatever sadness and affliction and purifying trials God may any how send upon him, if so be he may be set on the right hand, and hear the Judge absolving him at the last day?

So precious, such a friend in need, is this saying of Almighty God, one among very many like it; "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you; saith the Lord of Hosts." But the prophetic Spirit goes on to intimate, that many sinners would not so receive it. Instead of returning with their whole heart and life, according to the merciful invitation, they will make answer and say, "Wherein shall we return?"

This is a mode of speaking which we often find in the Jews of Malachi's time; and it is one of the many instances, in which we must own that there is a

[d] Ps. li. 10, 11.

remarkable resemblance between those times and our own. Thus in the very beginning of the prophecy, "I have loved you, saith the Lord; yet ye say, Wherein hast Thou loved us?" Again, when God reproves them for neglect of His fear and honour, they say, "Wherein have we despised Thy Name?" When He charges them with polluted offerings, they say, "Wherein have we polluted Thee?" When He says, "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words," they say, "Wherein have we wearied Him?" And in another place, "Your words have been stout against Me, saith the Lord; yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against Thee?" In all these instances, you will perceive, the temper of mind and way of speaking is the same. Instead of submitting at once to God's reproof, they make answer, and pretend to argue the matter with Him; they go on, as if they did not understand what was said, as if their conscience did not smite them at all.

The reply in the text, "Wherein shall we return?" may be taken in the like sense, as if they who were reproved were not aware of any particular reason, why they should be called to repentance. Or it may be understood in a milder and better meaning, as spoken by a person really in doubt, wishing to repent, but hardly knowing how to begin. Either way, it is a manner of speaking and thinking, which one meets with every day in our times: in our times, I say, more especially; because the men of our times are, perhaps, remarkable for the same kind of notion of themselves, which prevailed in those to whom Malachi was speaking. They have a great notion of guiding themselves, and of knowing the meaning of every

thing; they value themselves on being, as they think, free from idolatry and superstition; they are very jealous of letting God's ministers reprove them, especially about things, concerning which their own conscience has not smitten them before. This is perhaps as common a disposition as any, among those who wish, more or less, to be reckoned religious and serious people in our time: and it is exactly represented by those Jews' peevishly or proudly saying to the preacher of repentance, "Wherein are we to return?"

Again, among better and more considerate persons, struck for the first time with the impropriety of any thing which they have been accustomed to do, or of leaving certain things undone any longer, it is not uncommon to hear the like question asked, although in very different tone and meaning. "Wherein shall we return? We feel that we have been somehow wrong; we clearly see that such and such things were of more consequence than we had thought; but we are so entangled with bad habits, and old companions, and a dim fear of further mistake, and a sort of awkwardness which hangs over us, not knowing how to begin our repentance, that we are utterly at a loss: do tell us which way to turn." And it may be observed that both these answers,—both the insolent and impenitent one, and that which expresses honest perplexity,—are commonly given in regard of those sins and duties, which it is most difficult to measure and put down in words exactly. In the spending of money, for example, all men know in general, that they are neither to be covetous nor extravagant; but it is not so easy to draw a precise

line, and say, this or that was an instance of covetousness in such a person, or of extravagance in such another: and, therefore, when people are warned and reproved on this head, it is easy for the hardened conscience to reply, "Wherein have I been covetous or extravagant?" and not uncommon for the tender but ill-informed conscience, to feel in general that the warning is needed, that there has been something wrong, while yet the person is at a stand-still, and does not see his way how to set out on a better road.

Now for the benefit of both sorts of answerers, God's wisdom has condescended to point out, by what follows in the Prophet, the right course to be pursued. The particular sin, which he here reproves in them, is their robbing God of His tithes; and when they say, "Wherein shall we return?" this is His Divine command: "Bring all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there be not room enough to receive it." That is, Make a courageous effort, and force yourself to do those things which are most contrary to the particular sin, against which conscience warns you. Do not stand waiting, and hesitating, and asking how you must set about the work of repentance; but at once begin exercising yourself, in whatever most contradicts the bad tendencies which you cannot help being aware of. If the evil spirit of impurity has at all laid hold of you, trifle not with it, but the very next opportunity you have, turn away your eyes and all your senses

from that, which you know is likely to corrupt them. If selfishness be your fault, force yourself to wait upon others. If you are inclined to high thoughts of yourself, turn steadily away from your own praise, in whatever form and shape it comes. And so in all other respects; and especially take care, what you do, not to do it by halves, but with a generous faith give up all to God, and prove Him if He will not bless you in so doing.

By way of conclusion, I will take an instance not very far from Malachi's: I will suppose that some man, during this year that is passed, has been guilty of the deadly sin of stealing, or otherwise unfairly making gain of what was other men's. To him God's command by the prophet is clear. Never mind the shame, the pain, or the loss, of making full restitution of all you have taken. Restore it, if you can, with large amends: the Law of Moses said fourfold, and Zacchæus the publican, we know, did the same, proving thereby the sincerity of his repentance. Upon which our Lord gave him a special blessing, and declared that salvation was come to his house. If we would have at all the same kind of blessing, let us see to it that we follow his example, and make full restitution of ill-gotten gains, as far as ever it can be brought about. Be not afraid of the shame, or the pain, or the want; think of God's blessing, think of Christ and His holy Angels, well pleased to behold you from heaven; think that there cannot be a likelier way of ensuring to yourself a happy new year.

But it may be, actual restitution is become impossible; as it too often justly happens to us, that even

when we truly repent, we find the mischief we have done incurable. Perhaps the person wronged is dead or far away, and we know not how to have any dealings with him, or you cannot exactly tell whom you wronged; and this I take to be a very common case, that people go on in some way of business, taking little unfair liberties in matters of selling and buying, labour and handicraft, until the sum of their gain, and of their sin too, is very large, and yet it would be hard for them to say, "So much was taken from this man, so much from that," and to make satisfaction accordingly. What are such to do? Jesus Christ, in His great mercy, has left them a plain way to the blessing of Zacchæus, or some good portion of it. He is present among them, by His poor and needy, ready to receive their offerings, sincerely and humbly given, as true tokens of repentance: even as Zacchæus, besides restoring fourfold to those whom he could remember to have wronged, and who were within reach, gave also half his goods to the poor, by way of restitution, of those many other unfair gains, which had helped him, as a heathen tax-gatherer, to become rich. Do you as he did, and a blessing will come to your house.

But perhaps it is out of your power to make restitution in this way either. You are too poor; or the wrongs you did your brethren were not in money matters, nor such as could be measured in money. Well, at least you may repent bitterly, you may confess your sin, you may punish yourself in many ways. You may warn those who have been so unfortunate as to fall within the reach of your ill-example; or, if they be gone, you may warn

others: you cannot be too careful in watching to give no scandal, no temptation to sin, especially in the same way, to any who come near you. You can help them by good example, if in no other way; or, if the time be gone by for that, you can help them by prayer. And, last of all, you can take patiently, nay, I will say thankfully too, whatever pain, sorrow, or disappointment, God sends on you for the punishment of those your old sins. You may say, not only with your lips, but with your heart, "May I suffer more and more here, so I may be forgiven through Jesus Christ hereafter."

These things if we do, we may hope that the unspeakable grace of God may fulfil in us, great as our backslidings may have been, that merciful saying, "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you." We may not at first feel the difference; we may not know how and when the light of His forgiving countenance begins to beam towards us again. But in time, even here, we may be able to trace it; like a path, as some one has said, over the mountains, becoming visible as we remove to a distance from it. And hereafter, should we be so happy as to attain that world, we shall own, with joy and wonder, that not one good thing of all the Almighty promised has failed to come to pass. Only let us begin courageously, and at once, and persevere humbly and patiently; for the journey is great for us, the time is short, and we, alas, are far behind.

SERMON XXV.

THE PERIL OF BACKSLIDING.

FOR THE NEW YEAR.

REV. iii. 3.

"*Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*"

No illnesses are more fatal and distressing than those which lurk privily in the bodies of men, making themselves little felt, until they have secretly destroyed some vital part of the constitution, so that they will soon make it impossible to breathe. Sad indeed it is, when all of a sudden both the friends of the patient first, and afterwards himself, become aware that he is on the edge of the grave, and they knew it not. And all must have observed, how long in such instances people go on, refusing to see the truth, buoyed up by false hopes, and looking onwards to months and years of health, even when all around them have long beheld the finger of Death most evidently marked upon them.

It is very sad, but there is something a great deal more sad and sorrowful; and, as I fear, we must

with shame confess, a great deal more common: I mean, the case of persons far gone in deadly and destroying sin, without being at all aware of it themselves. Hopeless indeed is the transgressor's case, as long as he thinks himself good enough; he will neither betake himself to that gracious Saviour, by Whose Blood alone his sins can be washed away, nor will he pray earnestly to the good Spirit of God, without Whose special grace he never can repent or amend. Now, how is it, that Christian people, such people as we have commonly to deal with, (for I am not speaking of those who have been utterly neglected, and left to grow up, and go on as heathens, without God in the world,) but how is it, I say, that persons who have been taught their duty, and have been living in some respects a decent life, too often gradually lose themselves, fall into mortal sin, and cast their souls away without being at all aware of it? I will tell you, how I suppose it to take place, at least in a good many instances.

Christian children, boys and girls, are taught at school a certain rule of behaviour, higher by a good deal than what they commonly see in the world; so high, that in too many cases they cannot but see that their own nearest relations and friends think very little of it. They are taught, e. g. that to tell lies is a grievous breach of the ninth commandment; yet those who are most bound to set them an example at home, make no scruple of telling lies when they think it most convenient; and the children know this and hear it. They are taught, "thou shalt not steal;" and to keep their hands from picking, i.e. from purloining, but they see their neighbour's goods

freely taken, whenever it is thought to be safe and convenient, by those who are their elders and ought to be their betters. And so in many other instances, and in respect of all the commandments. The children learn, from their very early days, to know what is the good and perfect will of God; but very commonly they learn also, in a blind way, the notion, that they are not really to try their best to do His will. The holy lessons, which the Church teaches them in school, are contradicted by the lessons of the world and the devil, which meet them every where out of school. Nevertheless, a good number come in earnest to know their duty, what to believe, what to do, and how to pray. Not only can they give an answer concerning it in words, but they perceive and know it in their mind's eye, and they are not without a feeling in their hearts, how good and pleasant it it would be to *do* it. At this time, by God's good Providence, they have usually a chance of being *confirmed*, and I doubt not but that, please God, the greater part of those who are so confirmed do really intend at the time to be good Christians. While the lessons of that time are fresh, they really do perceive and feel in their hearts, that it will never do, to walk by the vain rules of the ordinary sort of people; that they must "not love the world nor the things that are in the world," for "[a] the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that *doeth* the will of God"—not he that knoweth, but he that doeth it—he and he only "abideth for ever." Young persons, just confirmed, often see and feel this, and are so far in earnest, when they promise to walk accordingly;

[a] 1 S. John ii. 17.

and often-times they go on and on and do more or less towards fulfilling their promise. Feeling that they "are in the light," they "walk" for a time "as children of light;" they resist temptation; they set themselves good rules, and call themselves to account when they break them; they try to be punctual and attentive in prayer, and are vexed and humbled to find themselves so often wandering: they endeavour to keep their senses and their tempers in order. But by degrees, the serious and earnest heart, in far too many, waxes cool; good endeavours grow fainter, and evil customs return; the Evil one, and his servants their wicked companions, are not slow to perceive the mischief, which is indeed *their* good; and they are careful and active accordingly to put fresh temptations in the young converts' way: and so they go drifting away, down the stream; and, without knowing it, they are far behind the point of dutifulness from which they set out, when they ought to have been advanced far before it. You will know what I mean by "drifting away," It is what happens, when a boat or a ship is left to itself at sea, or on a running river; of course the vessel will not stay for a moment in one place: the tide of the sea, or the stream of the river, will carry it along, slowly perhaps but certainly; the motion may be so very gentle, that the people on board are not at all sensible of it; but it is not the less real, and so they will find bye and bye, when they look round and find themselves in sight of objects, from which they ought to have been far and far away. This is called drifting with the tide or down the stream; and you see at once, how nearly it resembles

the melancholy change, which comes over Christ's disciples, when, after good beginnings, they allow themselves to relax and grow careless, taking one liberty after another, until, without knowing it, they have quite lost all the ground which the grace of God had enabled them to win.

I have mentioned by way of example the case of persons lately confirmed: but this drifting, this silent decay of goodness, is what we are all liable to. As the steadiest vessel will be wafted away from her station, if there be no anchor nor other means to keep her in it, so the oldest and most experienced Christian will fall away, fall utterly, and that perhaps without suspecting it himself, if he be not continually keeping fast hold of our Saviour by faith and prayer, and devout use of the Sacraments. Here is one great reason, why we should take advantage of such solemn seasons as the present. Christmas and the New Year are moments, when all, who are not quite childish and thoughtless, naturally pause and look around them, to see where they are, and consider how they are going on. Worldly persons, at such times, think it proper to balance their books, to settle their accounts and arrange all their affairs. And ought not we, Christ's servants, to take at least as much trouble for the settling our accounts with God, and putting our immortal souls in order? If we have been, as it were, asleep in the vessel, allowing it to drive where it would, now at least let us awake, and cast our eyes around us, and see how far we have drifted, and use all prayer and endeavour to recover our lost ground, if possible, before it be too late. As persons on board a vessel find, how far

they have drifted, by looking at hills or trees or houses or other objects on the shore, so this New Year supplies, as it were, a point, whereby we may judge of our own spiritual condition, comparing it with what we can remember of it last year. Little indeed, I fear, will most of us be able to remember, so carelessly in general do we keep our spiritual accounts. Still we may remember enough to make some of us ashamed and afraid altogether; others thankful for some ground won or preserved, yet very anxious because of the evil they have found all along in themselves, and the temptations which surround them. When this last year was dawning upon us, some of you, my brethren, had not long been confirmed, some had also become communicants. They were solemn promises which you made, high and deep favours which you received. How have you kept those promises? How have you shewn yourselves thankful for those favours? What is become of the prayers, which you then made and especially of that most devout and loving prayer, which the Bishop, with his hand on your head, made over you, and in which you surely joined with hearts full of awe; unless (which God forbid) you were hypocrites in the very act of kneeling to be confirmed? "Defend, O Lord," (these were the solemn words), "Defend, O Lord this Thy child with Thy heavenly grace, that he may continue Thine for ever; and daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto Thy everlasting kingdom. Amen." What care have you taken, since then, not to do things which would prevent you from continuing His for ever? What have you done towards daily increasing in His Holy

Spirit more and more? What reason have you to hope, that you have been ever since, and are now, on the way to His everlasting kingdom?

Some, it may be, opened this year, when it was new, in trouble and affliction. The Angel of Death had been in their houses, or they could discern him coming on: or the times had been bad, and they were full of fears and cares about their own and their little ones' maintenance: or some one belonging to them had behaved ill, or they were at least doubtful about his goings on; and the trouble made them for the time serious; it brought the other world nearer to them; it made them feel, how little we can do for ourselves; and they had many earnest thoughts. They resolved, as they believed, sincerely, to turn over a new leaf; perhaps they confirmed their good purposes with special vows and promises to God. What is become of it all now? If the trouble is past, has not the conversion passed with it? If we did make some little beginning, have we not, unawares, glided down to the former place? What if the misgivings and alarms, the humble confessions and holy resolutions of that time should be even now set down in God's Book against us, because we have not acted on them; because we have not persevered in them?

And there may be persons who, in the course of this twelvemonth, have felt themselves drawn nearer to God, they knew not how, without any special event, anything to cause grief or alarm. God was so very good to them, as to touch their hearts in secret, and cause them to yearn after something better than this ordinary life of our's, even after that

happiness which can only be found in communion with Himself. They could not be easy as they were; they tried to lay more earnest hold of the Cross; they said to themselves over and over, What shall I do to be saved? Their thoughts were more serious than before; their prayers more real; they did in a manner set themselves better rules of life. O, is it all gone now? Can it be, that after such special, and exceedingly gracious invitation, the favoured persons are gone back, one to his farm, another to his merchandise? And who then will pity them, when in the time of the great and final feast, they will find themselves in the outer darkness, crying in vain for admittance, and receiving for reply, Because I have called, and ye refused, ye shall call upon Me, and I will not answer [b]."

In whatever way the gracious Providence of our merciful Saviour has dealt with us, since this day last year, whether by special ordinances, as Confirmation; by troubles and fears; by inward admonition only; or by any other means: now, now, dear brethren, is the time to meditate reverently on His doings, and very seriously on our own. If the fruit of His merciful interference be not all gone from us; if by His grace any real amendment be now, as we hope, abiding with us; let us thank God, and take courage; persevering more cheerfully, and watching more circumspectly than ever. But if we have seriously failed, as is, alas, too likely; then hear what our Lord Himself hath declared concerning persons in our case. To such He says, by a letter which He dictated to His beloved disciple, "I know thy works,

[b] Prov. i. 24, 28.

that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead:" thou art called a Christian, called by *His* Name Who is man's life, but thy works are but dead works; as far as they go, thou art but a dead corpse. However there is a chance of revival. "Be watchful," look after thy soul; keep thyself awake as concerning eternal things, "and strengthen the things which remain, and are ready to die." As much as to say, Thou art not all over dead yet, but, without watching and strong endeavours, thou very soon wilt be. And observe the reason; "I have not found thy works perfect," complete, "before God." But you must not be good by halves, nor by mere beginnings. God requires works really done, fulfilled, wrought out, in His sight. Mere good intentions will not do; as the proverb says, the road to Hell is paved with them. And how are we to fulfil our good works? We must go back to our first rules, the old standard, "the Old Commandment," "the word which we have heard from the beginning;" what we vowed in Baptism, repeated in Confirmation, examined ourselves in, every time that we have duly received the Lord's Supper. We must try ourselves, as in our best days, by the Creed, the Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. So speaks again our Lord and Judge. "Remember therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent." Hold fast what thou hast done and believed well; repent of what thou hast done and believed amiss. Keep the good of this last year, and turn from the evil. Or else, hear what He threatens, He the merciful and long-suffering. "If thou wilt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief," without any notice whatever, "and thou shalt

not know in what hour I will come upon thee;" thy death and judgement will be sudden, unprovided, unprepared. O then, be warned in time; fear the Lord's threatenings, and accept His encouragements, or ever the Day be upon you. His encouragements are indeed very gracious. Lest you should think His commandments impossible, behold, He telleth you of some, even in your own place, who have actually kept them, not of course perfectly, but so unfeignedly, as to be free from serious sin. "Thou hast a few names" (He does not name any of them, and we do not usually know *who* are God's saints; but there are a few names) even in Sardis, in the worst of places, who have not defiled their garments. And what shall their reward be? and yours too, (for you by God's mercy, may if you will, be added to their company, though not as an innocent yet as a penitent) what I say, is their reward and yours? "They shall walk with Me in white;" they shall be pure in heart, and see God, for ever.

And now, my brethren and my children in Christ, it remains that with all my heart I wish you a comfortable, and a happy New Year; but whether your New Year will be happy or no, will depend entirely on your way of taking the kindly but most aweful warnings of your Saviour. It is but too likely that many will treat this, as they have so many former messages from Him. But nevertheless, it *is* His message and warning; all of us in our hearts know that it is; and the hour will very soon be here, when we shall every one of us be wishing, that we had regarded it more than we have.

SERMON XXVI.

GOD'S DEALINGS TO BE PONDERED.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

S. Luke ii. 18, 19.

"*All they that heard it, wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds; but Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.*"

Every year, the Church calls us in a manner to Bethlehem, to see the things which have there come to pass; to see the Most High God, the Co-equal and Co-eternal Son of the Father, newly born, a little Infant, taking up no larger space in the world which He made and preserves, than His tender limbs might lie on in the rude and narrow manger; to see Him, a true child of Adam, yet born without spot of sin; to behold His Blessed Mother bending over Him, and performing all the offices of a mother for Him, yet continuing a pure and unspotted Virgin; to hear the carol of the Angels and to see the Glory of the Lord, how it shone upon the quiet and simple shepherds, but was hid altogether as yet from the great ones of the earth. We, I say, my brethren, during this season which has passed, as in many former Christmas seasons, have by God's special favour been brought within hearing, yea, in a manner, with-

in sight of all these wonders. And whereas those shepherds at Bethlehem, and the neighbours to whom they told their story, could but admire and adore what had happened; we are, from our youth up, instructed in a great part of the meaning of it. They saw that it was altogether strange, altogether glorious, a kind of Heaven upon earth; but they could not yet know how nearly it concerned themselves and all men. We, by God's mercy, do, or may, know this. "[a]We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is True: and we are in Him that is True, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the True God and Eternal Life." *We* know this: but the persons who were on the spot, those who came nearest to His cradle when He was born, they did not as yet, the more part of them, know or dream of it. Yet even among them in their ignorance, there were two ways of receiving the Christmas good news; the one right, the other wrong; the one pleasing, the other displeasing, to our God. Some heard it all with mere wonder; "all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." Others, of whom the Blessed Virgin is the type and pattern, "kept all these things, and pondered them" in their hearts. As it was then with the witnesses of our Lord's Birth and Ministry, so is it now with all those, to whom, by the Church, He makes His Birth and Ministry known. Some *wonder* only; some, by His grace, consider. As afterwards, when He cast out a devil, from one who was blind and dumb, so

[a] 1 S. John v. 20.

that the blind and dumb both spake and saw: the multitude marvelled, and there was an end; but the more serious and considerate among them said, "Is not this the Son of David?"—so now, as often as we read of His coming down to join Himself to Adam's seed, and cast out the Evil spirit which had made men so long blind and dumb in spiritual things, we cannot indeed help wondering; but which of us does more than wonder? Which of us all, like that blessed Virgin Mother, lays up these things and ponders them in his heart? We have not now heard of them for the first time. Last Advent, and many Advents before, we have been told of Christ coming to judge us. Last Christmas, and many a Christmas before, we have been told of His coming to be made a little Child for us. Nay, more; as the Apostle says, that by the holy mysteries of our Communion, Jesus Christ is evidently set forth crucified among us; so may we say, that by the customs and ceremonies of Christmas time, He is evidently set forth, Incarnate and born among us; set forth in a manner to strike our very eyes and senses. Why are the Church bells rung at that time? Why are hymns and carols sung from door to door? Why are not only the Churches, but the very houses and streets dressed up in green boughs? Why do families gather, and children come home from school? Why is there especial joy and kindness in men's faces, and words of congratulation on their tongues, when they meet one another at this time of year more especially? Why, but because it is Christ's Birthday, and we all know that it is so, and have known it from our youth up. More or less, we have all been

aware that He was born at this time, and that His Birth brought Glory to God in the Highest, Peace on earth, and goodwill towards men. The shepherds have told us these things; that is, we have been taught them by God's own chosen ministers, whom He ordained to be over us His flock. And as we heard, we wondered at them; we could not help doing so, if we attended to them at all. But too commonly alas! when our wonder had passed away, we thought no more of them. We thought indeed sometimes of Christmas, and rejoiced in the hope of its coming again, with its many joys and delights. But it was a mere childish thought; there came not along with it any serious remembrance of God, made Man for our salvation; any deep thankfulness for His mercy; any earnest purpose to serve Him better hereafter. We smile at little children, when they think so much of the carols and evergreens, the mirth and good cheer, of Christmas. But how are we wiser or more manly than they, if we let the holy thoughts proper to that season pass away out of our minds, and plunge ourselves again without scruple in the cares and diversions of the world? What a sad, what a shameful appearance shall we make hereafter before Saints and Angels, when the Judge shall demand an account from us of the many Christmas seasons which He has allowed us here on earth, and we shall be forced to confess, that we gave them all up to nothing beside mere mirth and bodily enjoyment, even when we were old enough to know much better!

Why did God fill the whole history so full of wonders, which the Shepherds, His Ministers, tell

us of every Christmas? Not that we might just wonder at it, and go away, and mind other things, till we find something else to wonder at. Not so; but that we, like Mary, might keep all these things, and ponder them in our heart. It is told us more than once of that Blessed Virgin Mother, that favoured one above all, how carefully she practised this duty of devout recollection. None of all God's dealings were lost upon her. She carefully attended to them at the time, and treasured them up afterwards with religious care. When the Angel had left her, and the wonderful Incarnation of the Son of God had taken place in her womb, she began to ponder in her heart what the Angel had said of her cousin Elizabeth, and without losing time set out on her long journey across the mountains to see her. Whilst others were simply wondering at the shepherds' report of Christmas night, she was keeping it all in store, recollecting it carefully, going over it again and again, that she might lose no part of it. She was treasuring it up, as a miser might his money, that she might count it all over, and meditate upon it at her leisure. So again, twelve years afterwards, when that remarkable circumstance happened of our Lord's separating Himself from them in Jerusalem, and staying behind at the Feast of the Passover, we read of His Mother especially, that "she kept all these sayings in her heart." No hint that He gave was lost upon her. In the midst of His deep Humiliation, while He was subject to Joseph and herself at Nazareth, and working at that poor trade, she was ever calling to mind the glimpses she had had of His heavenly glory, and the wonderful words

which at any time had fallen from Him. He dwelt with them at Nazareth, and was subject unto them. But His Mother was all the while, all those eighteen years, keeping those sayings in her heart. Thus was she, by the grace of God, silently preparing herself, both for His Sufferings and His Glory, and for her own share in both.

So we may often see it to have been with thoughtful and religious persons, for whom God was preparing great and trying changes. They have watched His dealings with them, and so had warning. The patriarch Jacob was one of this sort; a great observer of God's providential tokens; whereby he came to acknowledge in his old age, so earnestly and devoutly, the God, before Whom his fathers had walked, Who had fed him all his life long to that very day, Who had redeemed him from all evil. And it is particularly mentioned how he observed what Joseph told him of his dreams. He treasured it up in his remembrance, as Mary did the wonders of her Child's birth. Of the Prophet Daniel too, that "man greatly beloved," we read [b] that he "kept the vision in his heart." He thought much of it, as a token from God, though he could not exactly understand it. S. John again, the beloved disciple, appears by his Gospel to have been a diligent watcher of what our Saviour said and did, and so to have come long afterwards to a right understanding of many things, which had been quite dark at the first both to him and the other disciples. More than once he has such sayings as these. "[c] When therefore Jesus was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered

[b] Dan. vii. 28. [c] S. John ii. 22.

that He had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said." And again on his riding into Jerusalem: "[d] These things understood not His disciples at the first; but, when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that that they had done these things unto Him." Here we seem to perceive clearly, that S. John also, like the Blessed Virgin, was accustomed to take note of all things which Jesus did, and to ponder them in his heart, long before he could rightly comprehend their meaning.

Putting all together, it is very plain that our gracious Saviour delights in those who mark and recollect His dealings with them; mark them at the time, and recollect them afterwards. They are highly favoured, like blessed Mary; greatly beloved, like the Prophet Daniel; or like S. John, they are disciples whom Jesus loveth. If we would please Him in earnest, if we would be favoured and beloved, surely we must try to be like them.

And we shall be like them, if, with prayer and good desires, we set ourselves to keep His ways in our heart, when He has any how made them known to us. "[e] Blessed," says the holy Psalmist, "is the man whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are Thy ways." "Blessed is he, who is not only stricken at the time with awe and wonder, when in any way Thou shewest Thyself to him, but who also lays it up in his mind and memory, loves to think of it, when he is alone; withdraws himself, as he best may, from common and worldly things, to meditate upon it." And this will be chiefly in regard of two

[d] S. John xii. 16. [e] Ps. lxxxiv. 5.

sorts of things: the one, solemn times like this of Christmas, when God permits and invites us to see more and more of His great work of salvation for the whole world: the other, His special providences over ourselves, often, very often, secret to all but ourselves, yet so clearly and so awefully marked, that we, whom they concern, cannot possibly doubt of their meaning. For example; too many an one of us before now has been set on some evil purpose, has made up his mind, perhaps, to venture it, has even taken the first step; when something which men would call an accident, little or great, has taken place and stopped him effectually in it. If he considers, he cannot doubt that this was God's merciful Hand, staying him when on the way to everlasting damnation. Balaam is an instance of this. He had set out on a journey which he knew in his heart displeased God, when his ass, after proving once or twice unusually restive, fell under him. This was just the sort of thing, which in ordinary life would be treated as a chance that happened to him; and so Balaam dealt with it. But the Lord opened his eyes, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with his sword drawn in his hand. Balaam's heart still went after his covetousness, therefore he was not really the better even for this fearful revelation: but well may we learn from what happened to him how deeply our Lord would have us think of all the providential circumstances that happen to us; how He would have us discern His hand in them, especially when they are so ordered, as to stay us in any course or purpose of sin.

The beginning of a new year is a time when nature

herself, and common sense and feeling, set us on thoughts of this kind: how we have dealt in the year gone by with Christ's holy times and special remembrances of His Presence; and again, how we have dealt with His special tokens and particular providences in regard of ourselves and our friends. In both, our Lord has shewed us His loving wonders. Have we just wondered at them and so forgotten them? or have we kept them like Mary, to the best of our power; and pondered them over and over in our heart?

This last year, like former years, has had its Christmas, its Easter and its Whitsuntide, its Lent and its Advent, its Fasts and Feasts; and we, if we have at all gone along with the Church in her services, have had the wonders of each time duly set in their order before us. Some of us may perhaps remember, whether at this time last January we made any serious vows, had any contrite self-accusing thoughts; whether or no we had at that time any misgivings about ourselves, any searchings and stirrings of heart, such as, it then seemed to us, we could never forget. We can tell, whether we had such thoughts, and we can tell, alas! whether we have remembered them, whether we have profited by them or no. We may remember perhaps, if we will try, what good resolutions we then made, to overcome, by God's grace, the remnant of our old sins; to break off such and such evil habits, which we felt ashamed for God to know of; to do right, and persevere in doing it, whatever other persons might say; and never to be ashamed of Jesus Christ and of His Words. We may recollect that last New Year's Day we had some such thoughts as I have

now said: and we of course know, how well we have attended to them. If we have failed, let us now with all our might prepare ourselves to do better; it is not too late; by His undeserved mercy we are yet in this world, not where we deserve to be; it is not too late. Only remember, Whatever good desires and holy vows God shall now put into your hearts—remember to keep them there, and to ponder them over.

So again with regard to special interferences of Providence. I make no question at all, but that every man who now hears me has had occasion, within the last twelvemonth, to admire and adore God's merciful Arm, stretched out either to smite or save himself or some one dear to him. I make no question, but that if we had watched, we might be able to tell of many gracious hints, many low but plain whisperings of God's ever-present Spirit, which have come to us since the beginning of last year, making a great difference to us for good or for evil; for good, if we marked and obeyed: for evil, if we neglected them. Well! Whatever has been our past behaviour, here, by His great mercy we are; spared, while so many no worse than ourselves have been taken; and our good God is still going on with His silent whisperings to our conscience, as well as with His open warnings and tokens in His Church. What shall we do this year? Shall we neglect, or merely wonder, or keep it all, and ponder it in our heart, and try, by His grace, to live accordingly? One or the other we *must* do: and we had need be careful which we do, for it will very likely determine our lot for ever. Consideration or carelessness now, may make us happy or wretched to all Eternity.

SERMON XXVII.

CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGES NEGLECTED BECAUSE UNDISCERNED.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

Ps. lxxii. 6.

"*He shall come down like the rain into a fleece of wool, even as the drops that water the earth.*"

We walk by faith, not by sight. The Gospel, from beginning to end, is a call on us to lift up our hearts to things, which are entirely beyond the reach of our outward senses. Take the great seasons for example; Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide, and consider the blessing which belongs to each of them: Christ born, Christ risen, Christ coming down by His Spirit, are all entirely out of sight. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard[a] of such things: nor could they ever have entered into the heart of man, had not God revealed them unto us by His Spirit.

As to the particular blessing of Christmas, which the time calls us still to meditate on, I have tried to shew you in some measure, how mysterious and inward it is: how unlike every thing which we might expect, judging from the ways of the world and our human reason. Christ came in the night, and in silence, and when He was come, He seemed like an

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

ordinary man: His Church began obscurely, among the poor and unlearned: His kingdom in our hearts begins secretly and mysteriously, when we are baptized as little children; and it is altogether out of sight; it is matter of faith, not of observation or experience. It is like the rain or dew coming down when men are asleep, and changing the face of the earth, we know not how.

Now as all the things of faith are more or less hard to be received, so is this blessing of Christmas; the silent comings of our Lord and of His Kingdom. The natural senses and thoughts of man rebel against it, and would fain make it out to be otherwise. Thus, when our Lord was born in the night at Bethlehem, born in a stable, and laid in a manger, His birth outwardly like that of any other poor child, except that it was poorer and more humble than ordinary; the Jewish people could see nothing in it: they had got their own notions beforehand, as to how Christ should come: they would not believe that God would save the world by a way so quiet and humble and so far out of sight; and so most of them refused even to enquire about our Lord: or if they did enquire, it was just enough to find some excuse for not regarding Him: as those did, [b]who said "Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said, that Christ cometh out of Bethlehem?" Why, if they had taken a little more trouble, they would have found that He did come out of Bethlehem: but they were set against Him, and so glad to take hold of the first scruple they could find.

And as the Jews were thus prejudiced against our

[b] S. John vii. 41, 42.

Lord, on account of the silence and obscurity of His coming, so has the world from the beginning, been always prejudiced against the Church. The wise men and nobles among the heathen were tempted to say, "Who are these Christians, that we should pay so much attention to them? they have sprung up, nobody knows how, in an obscure corner of the earth; they have no marks of wisdom, grandeur, wealth," "[c] no beauty that we should desire" them. And even to this day, although God's wonderful Providence has so advanced the Church in the world, that it is impossible even for worldly men not to take notice of it, and allow that there is something in it, yet people in general are far from believing what Scripture plainly teaches concerning the Church: That "[d] God is among us of a truth:" among us far more nearly and more particularly than He was among the Israelites of old. They think well of the Church, more or less, as a good plan for making people good and turning their hearts to Jesus Christ; but they do not look on it as Christ's Body, the sure token of His wonderful Presence among men; any more than the unbelieving Jews looked on His visible Form and Features, as on the Home and Temple, where abode the Most High God, Eternal Son of the Everlasting Father, come down on earth to reveal the Father to mankind.

Yet again, as the Jews could not believe that the humble and lowly Jesus was Christ the Lord; and as the world cannot believe, that the visible Church, the body of Christians from the beginning, is the Body of Christ, and is silently accomplishing Christ's

[c] Isa. liii. 2. [d] 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

work; so it seems very hard for any of us, truly and thoroughly to believe what we have all been taught, of our own part in that heavenly Body. We are naturally impatient of being kept in doubt and darkness. It is not enough for us to be told that we partake of a blessing: we want to be assured of it; to have it proved to us; to see and hear and feel all concerning it; to receive some explanation of the manner and reason of it; just as sometimes sick persons are not content to obey the physician, and take his medicines, and be the better for them, but desire to be told all particulars, why and how such things are to do them good. So it is with us, in respect of what we learn in the Catechism concerning the spiritual grace of our Baptism. We are there taught that Holy Baptism has made us, one and all, who have duly received it, "members of Christ, children of God, inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven:" that by it we are brought to a state of salvation; it was our "death unto sin" and our "new-birth unto righteousness," and that having been, "by nature children of wrath" we were thereby made "children of grace." All this we have learned, and we dare not deny it. But do we set our hearts to believe and consider the great thing which these words assure us of? We wonder at the Jews, that in the midst of our Lord's miracles, and with the Scriptures open before them, they could be blind to His high Nature. We wonder at the unbelieving world, that it cannot see something more than human in the continuance of His Church and Gospel. Do we see nothing to be wondered at in ourselves, that we should know and believe ourselves to be born

anew, born of God, made members of Him Who is both God and Man, the Holy Ghost dwelling in us as in a Temple; nay, that we are made "[e] partakers of the Divine Nature," the Father and the Son abiding in us: and that, believing all this, we should think ourselves at liberty to go on for a time in wilful sin, and think to make all straight by repenting, sooner or later, when it shall so happen? We think much of the blindness of our Lord's countrymen, and of the heathen world even now. Have we no misgivings, how blind and ignorant we shall at last appear to have been, ourselves, who have gone on perhaps many years in the full possession of the privileges of Christians, and yet have dared, with little or no scruple, to take the liberties of heathens: thinking, perhaps, the less of sins, because, we say, we are waiting for I know not what conversion and change of heart, and not considering, though we so often profess, that God's Spirit was given us when we were christened, to convert and change our hearts? So that the sad descriptions, which we read in S. Paul's Epistles, of the heathen world, appear to answer but too truly to the condition of the world we live in, Christian as it calls itself, and as it is in respect of its privileges. We Christians ourselves, I fear, as truly or more so than our unconverted fathers, may be said to be "[f] foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." How must it sadden the holy Angels, when they see Christ's chosen and redeemed ones going on in this way! They are fully aware of our privileges, wait-

[e] 2 S. Pet. i. 4. [f] Titus iii. 3.

ing as they do on all the holy Church Services. We are placed under their care at Baptism; they are by, when the Holy Communion is celebrated. Where the Church is, there are they, ministering to those whom God has sealed to be heirs of salvation, by making them members of His Son. How must it appear in their eyes, when Christians so madly throw away their blessings, and forsake their own mercy? As they rejoice with a heavenly joy over one sinner that repenteth, so must we not think that they mourn, (if mourning can be in such blessed beings,) that they mourn, in some unspeakable way, over the little ones whom Christ has washed and made holy, when they see them first careless, as if their sinning more or less were a matter of course, then going on from one transgression to another, till they are fairly plunged in wilful, deadly sin: and after all, if they do repent, grieving very little, hardly remembering their sin, hardly denying or punishing themselves for it, far too soon contented with their own contrition and penitence?

Let us attend to the meaning of the words, which the Church said over us when we were baptized; of our own words, when we say our Catechism; and we shall be able perhaps, in some degree, to enter into the mind of the holy Angels, who see things as they are, in this great matter: we shall begin to feel how low and unworthy our past standard and measure of goodness has been: how unlike what might have been expected in members of Christ, children of God, the sanctified, the elect, the new-born, the justified, the saved! All these titles, as we learn from the epistles of S. Paul, belong to us as baptized Christians:

and we have thought it a great thing if we have just kept from the worst sins, forbidden in the Ten Commandments to those who were yet far from the Kingdom of Heaven. If we have been poor and yet honest; if we have kept chastity in youth; if we have been provoked, and done no violence; if we have been decently dutiful to our parents, we think it is pretty well, and we have no need to fear our account. Nay, it is even worse than this: we think it is well, not only if we keep these commandments, these common lessons, as one said, of honest heathenism, but, if we break them and repent of doing so. How often do we hear persons under such circumstances held out as patterns, as safe and good examples! till at last the Christian world is come to imagine that the commandments were not meant to be observed, but merely to alarm men and bring them to the foot of the Cross. If we consider calmly, and try to see things as they are, I think we must many of us confess, that these or some such errors have had too great effect on us in the time past of our lives, that we have set our measure of goodness low and scanty, and then have fallen short even of it: far unlike S. Paul's rule and practice: far unlike what our rule and practice would have been, had we been used steadily to believe and lay to heart the words we have been used to repeat from our youth up. "Members of Christ!" think of that word. Really united to Him Who is over all, God Most High, Blessed for ever; endued with His All-powerful Spirit, and therefore able, if we will use our ability, to "[g] do all things through Christ which strengtheneth" us! Members of Christ

[g] Phil. iv. 13.

in body as well as in soul, and therefore bound with all devout care to keep both soul and body from impure and abominable fancies, and from what comes of them; since otherwise, (a thought too frightful to be uttered, had they not been the words of Scripture itself[h]) "the members of Christ" are made, or sought to be made, "the members of an harlot!" Members of Christ, and therefore members of one another, and obliged to wish and do one another all possible good and kindness, and no more to vex and disturb our brethren, than the eye would vex the hand, or the head the foot! Members of Christ, and therefore bound, above all things, to consider what Christ would do in each case: and utterly without all excuse, if we go on, merely amusing ourselves from day to day, taking it for granted that all is well enough, if we are no worse than other people! These are surely plain considerations, such as might be expected to come often into the mind of every person who can say his Catechism and believes it. Why have they been so seldom in our minds? The reason is, though we called ourselves and were believers, we did not steadily *walk* by our faith. We saw no difference wrought in a child by Holy Baptism; we did not understand how so simple an action, with no outward or visible effect, should make such a change in our inward and spiritual being: we forgot that this was the very nature of God's grace, to come down like dew, unseen, unheard, unfelt: and so we permitted the world and the devil to deceive us, and walked with the less remorse after the counsels of our own heart, as

[h] 1 Cor. vi. 15.

though we had been still heathens, and Christian goodness could not be expected from us.

Thus, I fear, it may have been with too many of us, during the past year and too many years before. If we have not been altogether careless and unthinking, if we have not lost ourselves in deep and deadly sin, yet we have struggled less against our frailty; the sin to which we are most drawn has more easily prevailed over us: we have fallen oftener, risen more slowly, repented less bitterly, done good less zealously, than if we had known and considered the Gift of God, the unspeakable Gift, dwelling within us.

All this being well considered, it is very plain what sort of resolutions we ought to be making for ourselves, for the ordering of our heart and conduct during the year which is now beginning. God has spared us to see the beginning of it: He has spared us who are here present, though He has given us plain warnings, how uncertain our condition is. Death has been busy amongst us in such a way, towards the end of this last year, that I suppose every one must have said to himself, Who can tell whose turn it may be next? God has spared us for this very purpose, that we may be more serious this year than we were last year, that we may look on our own condition more truly, that we may know our own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in us[i]: He hath been within us, dwelling within us by His Spirit, since the hour of our Baptism, and we knew it not; or rather we were taught it, but never considered it in earnest, and our goings on have been most unworthy of Him. All this being so, what can we do

[i] 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

but endeavour with all our might to bear these great things in mind more steadily, during the year which is now beginning, or so much of it as God may allow us on earth? What can we do but encourage such thoughts within ourselves, as are most apt to make us serious, and put us in mind of the presence of God? Where then should we go so willingly as to Church? Whom should we seek to for companions so readily, as those whose good example, rather than their talk, silently and seriously puts us in mind whose they are? When shall we think we have done enough in the way of serving God and doing good? aware as we now are, how great a power was given us in the beginning, and how many wasted months and years we must account for, and how short a time is now left to make the most of? Again, why should we look for any immediate return and reward for our labours, whether in earthly or in spiritual matters? Should we not rather be afraid and humble ourselves, when any such appears to befall us? Seeing that God's way rather is to work very silently and secretly, when He comes down to bring a great blessing to His chosen, and that we know ourselves to be quite unworthy of any special favour at His hands.

Thus the thought of God's silent and great mercies in Baptism may teach us to judge ourselves and our condition soberly: and the same thought may teach us also reverence and great charity in our way of looking at all God's people. Be they who they may, as baptized Christians they have been the subjects of a great work of God; they have His seal on them and are members of His Son. Surely we must honour

and love them, this year, more entirely than in former years, and among them especially these two sorts; little children, out of whose souls we know the holy mark cannot as yet have been worn by wilful sin and carelessness; and pastors, ministers of Jesus Christ: who have another very holy mark over and above what was given them, in common with other Christians, in Baptism. Whoever thinks in earnest of his own Baptism, will not fail to see in Christ's ministers, and also in His little ones, very sure signs of His gracious and wonderful Presence; he will use himself to think of both very seriously, and will be very careful how he behaves himself towards them. And whoever adds to this the remembrance of time misspent, grace abused, sin committed, since his Baptism, I do not see how he should ever be able, as long as he is in the world, to get rid of the burthen of shame and remorse: how he should walk otherwise than mournfully before the Lord Whom he has offended: how he can ever be too modest, too self-denying, too humble, too tender in conscience. And being such, he may have hope; for "[i] all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word."

[i] Isa. lxvi. 2.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE WISE MEN FOLLOWING THE STAR.

S. Matt. ii. 2.

"We have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him."

In all the history of our Lord's manifestation on earth, and especially in the account of His Childhood, there is a wonderful mixture of openness and reserve. There is a veil over the brightness of His Presence, through which He allows Himself to be seen occasionally only, and not by all sorts of persons, but by a few only of a particular class and character.

Thus, in His Birth, how was the unspeakable dignity of the Son of God hidden and clouded over! His Mother, the wife of a poor carpenter of Nazareth; the chamber, a stable; the cradle, a manger: yet how wonderful the manifestation of His glory! Angels coming in brightness from the heavens to announce Him,—a thing which had never been known or thought of before, since, on the birthday of the world itself, "[a] the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."

Again, when He was circumcised, He seemed like

[a] Job xxxviii. 7.

one among many sinners, having need to be admitted into the Lord's earthly family: but great indeed was the token of His Majesty, in having His Name twice brought by an Angel from heaven; and that, the Name JESUS, which declared Him the Saviour of the world. Then He was brought to the Temple, in the usual way, with simple offerings, as any poor man's child might be: but He was received with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit of prophecy, so many hundred years silent in that place. Still, however, the Spirit was vouchsafed only to quiet and meek persons, and His message spoken of to those only who looked for redemption; even as before, His Birth was made known to the shepherds only, watchfully doing their duty; and the secret of the name JESUS, brought from heaven, was known, as far as we can tell, only to S. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin.

The next event in our Lord's Childhood is the Epiphany, or visit of the Wise men, which we commemorate this day. And here, surely, we may plainly perceive the same rule or law to have been kept. On the one hand, how clear and glorious the token from heaven! A new and wonderful star, appearing so far away, and inviting even Gentiles to so great a distance, not merely to see, but even to worship Him: on the other hand, when He is found, He is a meek and lowly Babe, resting on His Mother's knees, as any other child might do, in a poor cottage of a humble village. And the immediate consequence of their visit is, that He is forced to fly for His life; or rather His Mother and Joseph are forced to remove Him by night, as if He were helpless, like all infants, and could do nothing for Himself.

They worship Him, owning His Godhead: He flies, confessing Himself a true child of man, as we are.

Thus the Epiphany, like the other manifestations of our Lord, partly veils and partly discloses His glory.

As in those other instances also, the disclosure is made to persons of a certain character, and to those only. It is not hard to see what sort of mind these Wise men were in; how earnest, not only in obtaining what heavenly knowledge they could, but also in obeying what they knew. They lived in a country, and most likely belonged to a profession, in which the observation of the stars was great part of their daily business. And as the shepherds, when the Angel was sent to them, were watching over their flocks by night, that is, in the honest exercise of their daily calling; so this star was ordered to meet the eyes of these men, so learned in the signs of the heavens. It seems in both cases to signify that God loves to visit, with His heavenly and spiritual blessings, those whom He sees diligent and conscientious in their daily duty.

Now the star was of course something extraordinary, something different from other stars, as indeed the whole course of this history shews it to have been. There can be little doubt that it was a glory, a miraculous appearance, sent from heaven for this very purpose. And it might be, the Wise men had heard or read of that old prophecy, which mentions that a Star should one day rise out of Jacob [b]. For Balaam, who uttered that prophecy fourteen hundred years before, was himself one of the Wise men of the East,

[b] Num. xxiv. 17.

and his words might be known and remembered, especially as Moses had set them down.

However, either by that prophecy, or in some other way, God had made known to these Wise men, when they saw the star in the East, that it was a token of the birth of One, Who should be King of the Jews, and they set out at once on their long journey to worship Him. The length of the way did not keep them back, nor yet their having to go to Jerusalem, which was at that time thought little of among all the nations of the world. They were of a sort of persons renowned for their wisdom, yet they were not ashamed to ask for guidance of those who were least esteemed in the world, because they knew they were the people of God.

And God encouraged them: they found the place which they sought. Herod, and the chief Priests and Scribes, enemies of our Lord, and designing to slay Him, told them, however, where to find Him, and directed them to the old prophecy concerning Bethlehem. This was great encouragement: to find that the Scriptures of God, as interpreted by those whom God Himself had made guardians and expounders of them, guided them onward, instead of checking and disappointing them. And it was still greater, even miraculous encouragement, when immediately on their setting out for Bethlehem, the star which they had seen in the East appeared again: and now it disappeared no more, till it "came and stood over where the young Child was," marking out the very cottage in which the Holy Saviour might be found.

Thus they could have no doubt: they were quite

sure it was He Whom they sought. They were as certain as the shepherds, when they had come there obedient to the voice of the Angel. It moved them not at all that they saw but a little Child, resting on the bosom of a poor Maiden, with an aged man waiting by. Their faith had brought them so far, under direction of their heavenly Guide, and they were not now going to swerve from it, and begin indulging unbelieving thoughts. They fall down at once, and worship the young Child, and offer Him the very best that they have to give, the treasures and gifts which they had brought with them on purpose, "gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Having thus done, the Wise men receive another warning from God in a dream, which way they should go home; a favour which shewed that He was graciously pleased to accept all they had done hitherto. And having come home, they lost not their faith, but, as ancient tradition relates[c], were ready to receive the preaching of the Gospel from S. Thomas, when he came into that country, some years after the Ascension of our Lord. These Wise men assisted that Apostle in bearing witness to the Cross among their own countrymen in the East.

Such were the persons who were honoured by our Lord to be the second set of chosen witnesses, invited by miraculous guidance to see Him in His Childhood. Are we not, so far, all of us like them, in that, when children, we too have a sort of Star in the East, to guide us towards the cradle of our Lord? We are carried to Church, we are taught to pray, we learn more or less of Scripture words and histories:

[c] S. Chrys. Hom. vi. on S. Matt. § 5. Oxf. Tr.

God gives us notice, in various ways, of that wonderful Child, Who was born at Bethlehem to be King of the Jews: various things happen, from time to time, which give us a sort of blind indistinct feeling, that there is within our reach, we know not how near us, a great and heavenly Being, could we but feel after Him and find Him.

Now these notices and feelings, if they are indeed sent by the Most High, as the star was sent to the Wise men, will guide us, more or less directly, to Jerusalem, that is, to the Holy Church of God, the city set on an hill which cannot be hid. We indeed are in that Church already, by the Almighty's especial favour, ever since the moment of our Baptism. And still as we search after the truth, our thoughts are brought back to the same Church; and Providence teaches us, as the star guided the Wise men, to go to Jerusalem, the Church and city of God, and ask where the Truth, that is, Christ, is to be found.

And the Church, like a gracious mother, will be ready at our need. She will guide us, as herself is guided, by Holy Scripture. She will send us to Bethlehem, because it is so written in the Prophets: Bethlehem, which is, being interpreted, the House of Bread, and which therefore is an apt figure of the place where He gives Himself to us, Who is "the true Bread which cometh down from heaven, the Bread of God which giveth life unto the world[d]." The Church, in short, being guided by the Scriptures, will send us to the Holy Communion, there to worship and receive Jesus Christ. What have we to do in this world, but to prepare ourselves, and follow that

[d] S. John vi. 32, 33.

heavenly guidance? And we are so far rightly preparing ourselves, as we really from our heart are endeavouring to copy the Wise men in their search for the new-born Saviour.

The Wise men were ready to follow wherever God's providence might lead them, however slight and even doubtful the notices of His will might be. They follow the star, not knowing whither it would take them, much as Abraham had done, from nearly the same country, two thousand years before. So ought it to be enough for us to know the next step in our journey, the next thing God would have us do, with something like tolerable certainty. One step before them, is as much as sinners in a troublous world should expect to see.

The Wise men did not mind the trouble of their journey to find our Lord. Day after day they went on, and still the star, as it may appear, or at least some providential sign, shewed them they had still further to go; and they did not grow weary, nor turn back, nor say, "Why could not we as well have honoured the young Child at a distance, in the sight of God Who knows our hearts?"

This surely may reprove our indolence and want of faith, who are so seldom willing to leave our homes, and go ever so little way, there, where we are sure the young Child is to be found, but rather put up with idle excuses, the more profane because they make a shew of respect, of God being in one place as much as in another, and of our being able to serve Him at home as acceptably as in Church.

Neither, again, did those Wise men shrink from their long journey, nor fear to ask about our Lord,

or to go where they heard He was, or to worship when they had found Him, lest they should be wondered at, and thought strange, and pointed to, as wilfully and fancifully making themselves unlike other people. No such thought, it would appear, came at all into their minds: they just followed the star and the Prophet, whether those who looked on derided them or no. Will it not be a good token of our faith, when we too make up our minds to obey the Church, and serve God as we best may, not regarding what kind of talk people may at first make about it?

I say, *at first*, because in no long time, if we let them alone, they will let us alone. It is but exercising a little courage and perseverance at first, and taking care not to disgrace our profession by wilful sin; and we shall quickly find leave from the world to serve God regularly in spite of her scorn.

Further, the Wise men were not ashamed to acknowledge and honour Christ as especially present in a poor cottage, and as a young Child: neither let us doubt, but take Him at His word when He says, "[e] Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto Me;" and again, "[f] Whosoever shall receive one such little child in My Name, receiveth Me." As ever we desire to find Christ truly in His Sacraments and His Scriptures, be it our care never to forget Him in His poor, if we can relieve them; or in His little ones, if we can help them to continue His, at least by not doing or saying any thing to corrupt them in the way of bad example.

The Wise men, being bidden by an Angel not to

[e] S. Matt. xxv. 40. [f] Ib. xviii. 5.

return to Herod, obeyed, and went back as they might some other way. They did not stumble at the command, though it might seem strange to find so sacred a Person in danger, and His life made to depend on any thing they could do. They did not say, "How is this? that He should be the Son of God, and yet we must go out of our way to save His life from the tyrant?" But being bidden, at once, without objection, they obey the bidding. It will be a good sign when Christian persons, having found truth, shew themselves worthy of it, by the like obedience to plain commands, without asking questions.

Lastly, the Wise men grudged not the Holy Child the best and most expensive gifts they could offer, though it were hard to see how some of them, at least, could be of any use to Him. But they were full of adoring love, and a heart where love dwells cannot stop to consider the use of things. Does not this tell us something about our way of serving and honouring Christ in His Churches, and in all that appertains to them, especially in whatever belongs to the services of the Holy Communion? Ought it not to be all as handsome as we can make it? Ought we nicely to count the cost, or measure the good done, when we are bringing our offerings for such purposes? Are we used to do so, when we are bringing tokens of affection to those whom we most love and honour on earth? Did David so behave? or S. Mary Magdalene? or these Wise men? or any of those whom the Bible mentions as honouring God and being honoured by Him?

For indeed these Wise men were greatly honoured

by Him; especially if, as was of old believed, they became afterwards disciples of His Apostle, ministers and stewards of His mysteries. Think what a glorious ending, from a beginning in appearance so slight and seemingly accidental, as their observing a particular star, religiously taking it to be from God, and with all perseverance inquiring its import, and following after its course.

Let any Christian child, or poor person as ignorant as a child, only go on doing his best in silence, God for His part will most surely keep and perform His part of the promise. Let the star, the lesser light you have, guide you to Christ here, that you may after this life have the fruition of His glorious Godhead.

SERMON XXIX.

THE DUTY OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

EPIPHANY.

S. MATT. ii. 2.

"We have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him."

THOSE among Christian working men, who truly love Jesus Christ and rejoice at Christmas with a Christian's joy; those who were minded on Christmas Day, like the Shepherds, to go with haste to Bethlehem and see this great thing which hath come to pass there; all such men must needs be glad and rejoice, when this present great Feast of Epiphany happens to fall on a Sunday, as is the case this year. For now the Church invites you, and the day of rest enables you, to come to Bethlehem (as it were) a second time, and find the Holy Family not yet departed. You are invited to join yourself in spirit to those Wise men from the East; you can in a manner see the Star, the bright and guiding light from Heaven, going before them to be your gracious Guide; you can trace it to the very cottage, and see how it stands over where the young Child is; you can take part in their humble and simple service, adoring the Infant, King and Lord of all. You may

enter with the Wise men into the house, and see the young Child and Mary His Mother, and may fall down and worship Him. You *may* do this, and by your coming to Church on this day, you profess that you *are* doing this. But perhaps in this, as in other things, we are, most of us, but little aware of the deep meaning and consequence of what we are ourselves doing.

Look once more at the holy picture, which the Finger of God has in a manner traced for our instruction to-day. Here are a set of persons; it is commonly supposed, as you know, that there were three of them, and that they were no less than kings in their own country. Scripture itself calls them Wise men, i. e. of high rank and good education, learned in all the studies of their own time and nation, especially in the knowledge of the stars, and high secrets of nature; which kind of knowledge not only requires very constant attention to keep and improve, but is also thought, as much as any, to be apt to withdraw men's hearts from the things of Faith. Nevertheless they did not think it too much to undertake that long and wearisome journey: and what did they come for? To the outward eye they come to see a poor carpenter's wife's child, and his mother taking care of him; they came to enter into a poor cottage at Bethlehem, to make their most humble obeisance to that little Child, to offer Him gifts which they had brought ready for Him from their own country, and so to depart. There was no miracle, no great work to be done: that one short visit, as far as we are told, was all that they came for.

Now this, to the outward eye, might seem simple enough, but you see how carefully it is set down in the Book of God, and how much the Church would have us think of it: keeping the memory of it, as one of the greatest days in the year; appointing the Creed of S. Athanasius to be said, as on a second Christmas Day; and in many places lighting up the Church with as much splendour as the congregation of the place can afford. We understand that all this is done in memory of the Wise men coming to Bethlehem, because that visit of their's was the beginning of our Lord's glorious Epiphany, or Manifestation to the Gentiles: those Wise men being the first persons, not of Jewish birth, who were permitted to see Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh: whereby He began to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles," as well as the glory of His people Israel. We then especially, who by nature are "[a] sinners of the Gentiles," are bound to think much of this most holy day, and to take opportunity from it to thank Him with all our hearts for choosing us out of the world to be Christians, members of Himself, while so many, yea by far the greater number, lie "in darkness and the shadow of death." For as Christmas Day is our Lord's Birthday in the Flesh, so is this Day of Epiphany as a kind of spiritual birthday to the whole body of the Gentile Christians, and among the rest, to each one of us.

But if we would make the right use of the day, we might learn of the Wise men, not only how thankful we ought to be to this our God made Man, made a little Child for us, but also in what way, especially,

[a] Gal. ii. 15.

He expects us to shew our thankfulness. It was not enough for the Wise men, having seen Christ's Star in the East, to believe and lift up their hearts: there was something more, something outward to be done: they had to come and worship Him: they had to take a great deal of trouble, to put themselves to inconvenience, to be absent from their homes, and interrupt their ordinary employments, for a considerable time: and what to many would be harder far than all this, they had to do something in open sight of men, which was very much out of the common way; something, which was sure to be noticed and pointed at, as a strange, odd, unaccountable step for persons, especially of their condition, to take. No doubt there were neighbours at hand, who would say to them, or to others concerning them, "How can any one be quite sure that this Star means all that it is said to mean? and supposing it should mean it, what difference can your going to worship the young Child make? Why cannot you worship Him as well at home? If He is God, as you say, He can see into your hearts, and will know just as well what your good meaning is towards Him, as if you made ever so many journies to wait upon Him. And then what is to become of your wisdom and knowledge and all your studies in the stars and other works of nature? And what is to become of your affairs and the affairs of your people, kings as you are, and so much looked up to by every one? Will it not all go on the worse for your giving up so much time to the visiting of this young Child?" Thus the Wise men's neighbours might have talked: and if they had happened to know anything about

Herod, they might have added, "Besides, after all, your going to Bethlehem will be but an outward bodily act: such a thing as the tyrant Herod might do: if he heard of this young Child, he might come and worship Him also, meaning the worst of mischief towards Him. Keep yourselves at home then and, if you like, worship Him in spirit; but do not be disturbing yourselves and every one around you with anything so unusual, so unaccountable, as this journey."

If there were any, so to remonstrate with the Wise men, they knew better than to attend to such talk: they had their answer ready, and it was a short and simple one: "We have seen His Star, and we know that we must go and worship Him." And their faith was greatly rewarded: how greatly, none shall know, but those who shall, by God's mercy, be admitted to see them one day Saints in Heaven. For that Saints they are, and the first-fruits of God's Saints among the Gentiles, the Church has always believed, and has honoured them accordingly.

Now do you not at once see, my brethren, how nearly we are concerned in all this? For we too have the star in the East: Christ's tokens have shone upon us, and that exceeding brightly. From our very babyhood, as long as we can remember, we have been told of this young Child and of Mary His Mother: our catechisms have told us of Him, we have been taught to name Him in our prayers, and to bow at that Most Holy Name: we have seen His House with the sign of His Cross upon it, far unlike all the other houses around us, and His Day far unlike all the other days of the week: we have been

taken into that house, and told how to behave there, because He is there: We have been taught something of the Holy Bible, His Book, and how unlike it is to all other books: We have all our lives long been used to the sights and sounds of Christmas, the carols, and the green boughs, and all the rest. The time would fail me to tell the hundredth part of the tokens that are around us, that we have really and truly seen that star in the East, Christ present by His Church and all His visible tokens here on earth. Indeed what else do we mean when we profess and call ourselves Christians, as we all undoubtedly do, and should think it hard if we were not so accounted of?

By our own confession, then, we have all of us seen Christ's Star: but surely we do not all of us consider, as we ought to do, that we are bound therefore to come and worship Him. I say, to WORSHIP Him: for *that* is the word, *that* is the duty, to be especially thought of to-day. Observe, my brethren, what "worship" means, and how it is constantly spoken of, as being paid to our Saviour. It means properly "bowing one's self down to the earth before a person," and so acknowledging Him to be your superior. The devil wanted our Lord to worship him, i. e. to fall down before him, as though he, the Evil one, were the lawful owner of this present world; and our Lord, in reply, silenced him by declaring this His eternal law, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Our Saviour then, being True God, is worshipped both in heaven and in earth by all His dutiful and obedient creatures: they confess and own Him as their God, in all ways

inward and outward. The Angels worship Him with peculiar honour as God made Flesh: for it is written, "[b] When He bringeth in the First-begotten into the world He saith, Let all the Angels of God worship Him." The leper fell down and worshipped Him, when he came to be cleansed; so did Jairus in behalf of his dying daughter; so did the Apostles, smitten with awe when they saw Him walking on the sea; so did the woman of Canaan, to get the devil cast out of her daughter: so did the mother of Zebedee's children, when she would obtain a gift for them; so did all the disciples after His Resurrection: when He left them to ascend into Heaven, they were in the act of worshipping Him. Worship, in short, is owning Him for our King and our God, not in thought only, nor in word only, but in outward actions, such as our fellow creatures can take notice of. This He expects of us all, to *come* and worship Him: not only to pray, not only to exercise ourselves inwardly in good, dutiful, religious thoughts, but to render Him homage in the sight of men and Angels: to confess with lip and knee as well as with heart, that [c] we have none in Heaven but Him; neither is there any upon earth that we desire in comparison of Him. This is a distinct duty, and cannot be satisfied by any devotion which is only between God and ourselves. As our King, He expects that we should wait upon Him in public, and tender Him our reverent adoration in the presence of all His people, Angels and men: but this we cannot do, except we come where Angels and men are assembled around Him, their God: and where is that, but

[b] Heb. i. 6. [c] Ps. lxxiii. 24.

in His own Place, the Church? Thither we must resort, as the Israelites resorted to Jerusalem: wilfully to stay away from Church, is to fail in dutiful acknowledgment to our great and holy King. This should be considered more than it is: it will help us all to understand better, why holy men and holy women have at all times made such a point of coming to serve God here in His own House. We have known, for example, aged persons and others, who had become so deaf that they could not hear a single word, how they have come religiously into the congregation, and have done their best to join in the service. Why? Might they not as well have said the same prayers and read the same lessons, to themselves at home? No, they knew it would not have done as well, for there would have been no *public* worship: their light would not have shone before men: they would not have been giving the same glory to God, nor bearing the same witness to Him in sight of their fellow-men. Thus a great part of their duty to Him would have been left undone. And alas! my brethren, is not the same duty far more inexcusably left undone by the many, who *can* hear, who have their health, who live conveniently within reach of the Church; and yet allow themselves, Sunday after Sunday, to neglect the great duty of coming to adore our Saviour? They little think Whom they are affronting, to whose whispers they are listening: least of all did they think, the first time they lightly permitted any foolish trifle to keep them from God's House, what a grievous chain they were beginning to forge for themselves, the chain of a bad miserable habit, incurable save by the special

grace of God. No one would believe, till he had seen or unhappily tried, how fast, how fearfully fast, the custom of not going to Church will form itself in a man. It seems such a simple easy action, for a person, when his time comes, to prepare himself and go to his Lord's House. But those, who have long left it off, are suffered by Almighty God, in just judgement, to sink into such sloth and cowardice, that they feel as if they really *could* not break the chain, and once more draw near to Him. But He is at hand to help them, and they may and must break through to Him. They see His Star, and they may and must come and worship Him, if they would not have Him count them rebels and enemies.

You, my brethren, who have come here to worship Him, may yet have need to be reminded, why He requires it of you to do so. Not merely for the edification and comfort which you may find here, not even for the spiritual grace which you hope to be blessed with in partaking of God's most holy Sacraments, but mainly, as I said, for this reason also, that it is an acknowledgment which Christ, as your great King, expects of you. Bear it in mind, and spread the thought of it as well as you can among your brethren (alas! too many), who are now so ignorant or so careless of it. Say to them as one said of old, This is where "[d] the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord; to testify unto Israel, to give thanks unto the Name of the Lord." Say to them, you have seen His Star as well as we: why will you not come with us and worship Him? Instruct them, that although the Lord does not now call us all to worship Him in some one place, as at Jerusalem, or

[d] Ps. cxxii. 4.

at such or such a mountain: yet wherever we are, He appoints us a place where we may come and "[e] worship Him in spirit and in truth:" not the less in spirit, because our bodies also worship Him; not the less in truth, because we worship Him in open communion with His Church, which is the Truth and Reality of all the old prophecies and parables.

And if we worship, we must give: we must give alms of our substance; and in Holy Communion we must offer to Him "ourselves, our souls and bodies." Even as the Wise men opened their treasures and to their lowly King presented gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And if it puts you more or less out of your way, either to come to Church at all, or to spare something for an offering to Him there, this is the trial of your faith. O pray that you may meet it courageously, and not draw back either from worshipping Him, or from giving: and then the Face of the Lord Jesus, that bright and morning Star, shall never be turned away from you.

As this is the first Sunday in the new year, I will end with a New Year's wish for you and for myself. "O that we may this year shew a more lively sense of the Presence of Him Whom the Wise men came to see, than we ever have done in former years! O that we all, according to our opportunities, seeing as we do His Star, may come constantly to worship Him: those who can conveniently, in daily service; those who can at all, in Sunday service; in reverence always; in Holy Communion; with child-like, earnest lifting up of the heart for ourselves and for all whom we ought to remember."

[e] S. John iv. 24.

SERMON XXX.

GREAT MYSTERIES IN LITTLE THINGS.

EPIPHANY.

ISA. lx. 22.

"*A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I, the Lord, will hasten it in his time.*"

IT has always been believed in the Church of Christ, that on this one day two great events took place, signal blessings both of them to the people of God. First, the coming of the Wise men, led by a star, to worship our Lord. Secondly, the Baptism of our Lord by S. John in Jordan. To which some add, thirdly, His beginning of miracles at Cana in Galilee, by turning water into wine. And accordingly we find that the services of the day make mention of each of these manifestations of our Saviour. The Bible Lessons and the Gospel point to the visit of the Wise men: the second Lesson in the morning, to the Baptism; in the evening, to the Marriage at Cana. It may indeed be doubted, on considering S. John's account, whether the miracle at Cana be rightly placed on the same day in the year with the Baptism. It would rather seem that it happened about fifty days, more or less, after it. There is no doubt,

however, that the mention of it is providentially joined with that of the other two, as carrying on with them, the great manifestation of Jesus Christ in the flesh. He was manifested to the Wise men by the Star, which guided them first from the East to Jerusalem. He was manifested to S. John the Baptist by the wonderful opening of the Heavens, by the Voice which owned Him God's Beloved Son, and by the Spirit, in a bodily shape like a Dove, lighting upon Him. He was manifested to His disciples and some few others by the secret and silent change of the water, provided for the purifying of the Jews, into wine, better than any which had been provided for the marriage feast. Each again of these manifestations was a token, or first-fruit, or sample, or beginning, of one or other of those great works which are for ever going on in His Kingdom. The adoration of the Wise men signified the coming in of all nations to worship the Holy Jesus, and make part of the Catholic Church. The Baptism of Christ, by which, as He declared, He was to fulfil all righteousness, was the earnest of His Spirit descending on the Church which is His Body, and on every member of it, and dwelling in them to unite them to Him, and through Him to His Father, which union is our righteousness or justification: since neither can we be holy nor God well-pleased with us, any other way, but only by our union with Christ. The water made wine seems in like manner to betoken Christ's sacramental Presence in His Church, causing such cheap and common things, as we know are the outward parts of the Christian Mysteries, to be not only pledges, for as-

suring us of heavenly things, but actual means also, whereby we receive the same. Thus the three manifestations, outwardly and visibly begun in the three great wonders which the Church sets before us to-day, are continually going on, to us invisibly, yet with surer and deeper effect than any of the things which we do see. God, Who guided the Wise men by a star, is daily spreading His Kingdom in the world, by ways which we cannot discern, but of which the sure end will be, that "[a] all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall do Him service." The sower has cast the seed into the ground, and seems to be gone away and to take no notice; but it is springing and growing up, we know not how; and bye and bye, when many are least thinking of it, it will suddenly be found ripe, and He will put in the sickle, because the harvest is come. Again, the Holy Spirit, Who descended on Christ in His Baptism, is daily descending on believers and believers' children in all lands, as they are, one by one, new-born in the mystical Jordan, the laver of Regeneration in Baptism; (so the Church of England calls it in the Office of Confirmation:) yet is this marvellous descent of His, and the Indwelling of the Father and the Son which ensues thereupon, a perfect secret to our senses and to the natural man: only the spiritual man knows it and trembles at it, being taught by the Bible and the Church. Again, if the bridal guests at Cana, and the servants, and the disciples tasted and saw and smelled the water that was made wine, it was but the beginning of an endless unspeakable miracle, that by which, everywhere in

[a] Ps. lxxii. 11.

the Church, the spiritual "Body and Blood of" our Lord "are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful" in the Holy Communion. Yet is not that miracle either at all perceived by any of our senses; the mean by which we discern and receive it, is Faith. We see then that, wonderful as the events are, which this Day's Festival commemorates, they were but the beginning of other wonders, equal to them, in the midst of which we Christians live and move. The poorest and most insignificant Christian has his part in these things; I do not say, *as much*, but more than any of the persons who were present when they took place. For they were not yet in the Kingdom of Heaven: they *could* not be, for it was not yet set up; and all these wonders belong to that Kingdom. Therefore not even S. John the Baptist himself had so much to do with them, as any little child has, who may now be brought duly to Baptism; and this we know by our Lord's own words, "[b]He that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater," has greater privileges, than even His own Forerunner.

These are aweful thoughts indeed, if we put our minds to them at all in earnest; they bring God so very near us. They come to this: that we Christians are even more bound to live in a deep sense of His Presence in Jesus Christ, than the Wise men to fall down and worship Him, when they came in and saw Him in His Mother's arms; that our adoring faith in the Holy Trinity sanctifying Christian children in Holy Baptism, and abiding in them if they abide in Christ's love, ought not to be less, but

[b] S. Matt. xi. 11.

if possible more, than that of S. John the Baptist, when he saw the Spirit descending from Heaven and abiding on our Blessed Lord: finally, that the invisible miracles, which He works among us by His Sacraments, ought to manifest forth His Glory to us, and cause us to believe on Him, as did these His first disciples, or even more earnestly than they did, we having a more bountiful promise of the Spirit to help us. Thus the mystery of the Epiphany sets forth how near we are to Christ, and through Him to God.

Now the first thought, which comes into a believing mind and heart, on this high and fearful doctrine, must surely be, "Who is sufficient for these things?" what can any of us do, suitable to such a calling as this? And it may be the Evil spirit may put it into some of our hearts, to give up all thoughts of taking this matter practically, seeing that it is something so "[c] wonderful and excellent," that we can never properly "attain unto it."

Now against all these, and other the like slothful or desponding thoughts, we may set one other circumstance, belonging as truly, as all that has been hitherto spoken, to each of the three Epiphanies or Manifestations of our Lord, in remembrance whereof this day has been always kept holy. The circumstance, I mean, is this: its seeming to have been specially ordered, that each and all of these wonders arose from very small beginnings. This is the consideration, which the words of the text suggest to us. They are the concluding words of a most glorious and overpowering picture of the brightness and

[c] Ps. cxxxix. 5.

happiness of the Church or Kingdom of Christ, such as He intended it should be, having the Lord God and the Lamb dwelling within it. "A little one," says the Lord by His Prophet, "shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation." As much as to say, These great, these infinite glories will take their origin from very small beginnings. The coming in of all nations to Christ will begin from three Wise men of the East, journeying privately from their own land to Jerusalem, finding out a certain poor cottage, and there kneeling down and making a present to a little Babe in His Mother's arms. The dwelling of the most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the souls and bodies of baptized Christians, began from a vision, most aweful indeed in itself, yet seen by one person only, the Baptist, abiding on the lonely bank of the Jordan. And it made no immediate difference in the outward appearance of things. Our Lord indeed was filled with the Holy Ghost, with unutterable power, yet to human eyes He went about as one of His brethren; there was no visible glory that men should adore Him. Again, the miracle of Cana was a thing done, if one may so speak, in a corner: the disciples only, and the servants which drew the water, knew of it: to the governor of the feast itself it was a secret. Yet it was the beginning of those great outward miracles which our Lord wrought in the sight of men, and of those inward ones, as great or greater, which He is continually working in His Sacraments out of sight.

What is the conclusion of this whole matter? Surely this: that for aught we know, it is throwing away the very greatest mercies of God, when we

allow ourselves to despise His small beginnings. E.g., here are little children brought to Church and school continually, and their faults, now while they are childish faults, to be taken notice of and corrected. Now it seems but a small thing, when we correct such an one for being passionate or wilful, or profane, or for using bad words. But it may have great results: it may, by God's blessing, be the commencement of a change in that child's whole behaviour. The seed of true faith, of true goodness, sown in him by the regenerating Spirit, may thus be hindered from dying away without fruit. And if one child grow up a good and faithful man, then his children, if he have any, will be in the way of faith and goodness also; and the families again of each of those children, and so on to a thousand generations.

We shall do well, then, to learn of the wonders of Christmas and Epiphany, not to despise "the day of small things." Out of such, the Lord hath promised, He will hasten the great things in His time. We shall do well to make this resolution: never to think any good action too slight to be worth practising, too mean to offer as a sacrifice to Almighty God. What is so utterly mean and slight in comparison, as earth is, compared to Heaven, time compared to Eternity? And yet time and earth are the preparation for Heaven and Eternity; and such as we make our moments here, such will God make our ages in the world to come.

SERMON XXXI.

THE DUTY OF BRINGING OTHERS TO CHRIST.

EPIPHANY.

S. MATT. ii. 8.

"*Go and search diligently for the young Child, and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.*"

HERE we have a remarkable instance of the way, in which Almighty God overrules the sayings of His enemies. They think they are speaking their own words, but in reality they are speaking His words. The holy Angels, who are present and hear what they say, put a very different meaning on it, from what they intend. As for instance, in the course of our Lord's Passion, when Pilate, convinced of His Innocency, had called for water and washed his hands, saying to the Jews, "[a] I am innocent of the Blood of this just person: see ye to it:" what answer did the Jews make? All the people answered and said, "His Blood be on us and on our children!" They meant merely to say, they would have Him crucified, come what will of it. But take their words in a Christian sense, and there could not well be a better prayer. For, so taken, they would mean, "May the Blood of the true Lamb of God, the only

[a] S. Matt. xxvii. 24, 25.

Sacrifice for sin, be so sprinkled on us and on our children, so applied to us, that our sins may for ever be taken away!" What could a man wish for better, for himself and for all whom he is most bound to love; and yet they are the very words of the spiteful Jews, uttered in bitter hate to Christ. Somewhat in the same way were words put into the mouth of the cruel Herod, which we Christians may take in a meaning far different from what he intended. Herod's intention is plain enough. He had seized the kingdom of Jewry, to which he had no right, and when a report was spread abroad that One was born King of the Jews, presently he was troubled; full of jealous misgivings. He fully purposed in his cruel heart to slay our Lord and Saviour in His cradle, and in order to make sure of doing so, he told the Wise men to let him know, as soon as ever they had found Christ out among the other babes at Bethlehem: pretending that he would come himself and worship Him also. All *that* is plain enough, as plain as it is shocking; but it is plain also that the same words will bear a very comfortable and Christian meaning; a meaning particularly suited to the season of Epiphany. For Epiphany is "manifestation," the Manifestation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, and to such as know Him not. The time of Epiphany is a time, when we are led to think much of our less favoured brethren who are not yet in Christ, who have never yet been baptized and made members of Him: who consequently are, as S. Paul says, without hope, "[b]and without God in the world." But although they know not God, yet are they not

[b] Eph. ii. 12.

altogether without any notion of God. They have a dim and indistinct feeling that all is not as yet well with them; in the darkness and sadness of their own hearts they reach and grope after something better; and though they never heard of their Redeemer, and cannot, of course, in words ask for Him, their very condition cries aloud, and speaks in their behalf to all Christians, to all who have better means of knowing our Lord, "Go and search diligently for the young Child:" look after Christ and find Him: and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also. This, I say, is the invitation of all men to those who know a little better than themselves. It is the invitation of the considerate heathen to us Christians, and of weaker and more imperfect Christians to such as have better helps. The very sight of the spiritual wants of our neighbours preaches to us a very moving sermon. It says, without speech of words, "Go and search diligently for the young Child:" i. e., improve as much as you can in the knowledge and love of Christ Jesus our Lord; and when you have found Him more thoroughly than as yet you know Him, bring us word again; let us your imperfect, perhaps unconverted brethren have the benefit of what God has graciously taught you; bring us word, that we may come and worship Him also.

It is true, these Wise men did not at all know our Lord, and we know Him. We were long since made by His mercy members of Him. Yet there is need for each one of us continually to know Christ better and better, and to draw nearer and nearer to Him: and therefore He comes as it were, every Christmas,

and offers, in a manner, to be born anew in our souls; and we have need to search Him out, as the Wise men had to search out Jesus, and come nearer to Him than ever, and honour Him with worthier offerings. Are we doing this, good brethren? are we making this use of Christmas? The Wise men, as soon as ever they saw His Star, set out to find Christ by its guidance. Like Abraham in his native land, when God called them and gave them a sign to go out, they asked no unseasonable questions, they obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither they went. Has our course been at all like theirs? We saw the star long ago, in our early youth; i.e. we saw, heard, and knew things which caused us more or less clearly to understand, that we must in heart forsake our own country, this perishable world of ours, and look after the Babe which was born at Bethlehem; for that nothing else could make us truly happy. Christ shewed us His Light: did we turn in earnest towards it? Did we, as soon as ever we were old enough to know right from wrong, did we turn towards the Holy Light, which God put in our hearts at our Baptism? Did we, at six or seven years old, give ourselves up to our Lord and Saviour, and make up our minds to serve Him, before all others, as the principal thing? Some boys and girls have done so, even at that tender age. What hindered you or me from doing the same? And all that have gone right, and pleased God in their time, have at some time or other deeply repented of not having so turned to God in their childhood. But even if a man did so turn, too probably he has since turned his face the other way.

Some ungodliness, some worldly lust, has got the dominion over him; and, whatever himself or others may think, his face is now towards the world, and his back towards Bethlehem and the Holy One Who shews Himself there. What shall we do, my brethren, should this be the sad case of any one of us? You are a father perhaps or a mother, and you have little ones depending upon you; perhaps some *very* little one, who has not yet been baptized, or brought to his Saviour at all. As he looks up to you from his cradle or from your lap, with his innocent eyes, does he not in silence seem to implore you and say, "Bring me to the young Child, that I may come and worship Him also:" and does not your own conscience at the same time speak to you even more plainly and say, "When I bring my child to Christ, surely I have very great need to search diligently for Him myself? For though I was brought to Him long ago, I have not staid with Him as I ought; my heart has departed from my Saviour, and gone astray after His enemies." Truly it is a sad thought, but I will tell you how you may turn it to good, and in the end comfort yourselves under it. When you bring your child to Christ, to be made one of His Innocents, try and bring yourself also, to be admitted as one of His Penitents. When you hear the Priest rehearsing, and the Godfathers accepting, the words of your child's baptismal vow, bethink yourself of your own many backslidings and breaches of the same vow, and, in the very deep of your heart, humble yourself for them before your God. Then will the Holy Font be a place of "manifestation," a place of Epiphany

to you and your child too. To your child, who has never yet sinned, our Lord will manifest Himself in Regeneration: to you, who are laden, alas! with many sins, He will manifest Himself in helping your Repentance. And having so found the young Child, Whom you had nearly or quite lost by your sins, go on and bring others to Him. Would you know how to do that? Observe where Christ was, when the Wise men found Him. He was in the city called Bethlehem. Bethlehem means, 'the House of Bread.' Our Lord is to be found especially in the House of Bread. And is not the Church the House of Bread to all who come thither in faith and obedience, seeing that in the Church *He* gives Himself in the form of Bread and Wine, Who is the Living Bread come down from Heaven to be the life of our souls? The Holy Table and Altar in the Church is verily and indeed the Bethlehem, where Christ shall be found more and more by those who look after Him in faith, repentance and charity. And that which guides them to the Altar is the heavenly Star, that is the Light of Christ in the Bible and the Prayerbook, and in all the holy teaching of the Catholic Church. As the star guided the Wise men all the way from the East into Bethlehem, so God's heavenly instructions in the Bible and by the lips of the priest, will guide us all, both wise and simple, to the Holy Table where the young Child is: i. e. the Church's teaching, if we will obey it, will cause us all to become worthy communicants. There we shall find the young Child with Mary His Mother, and S. Joseph waiting upon them. We shall not come in vain to Bethlehem; we shall not

come unworthily to the Sacrament, if we heartily seek there for these three things: the lowliness of the Blessed Jesus, the purity of the Virgin Mother, the dutiful obedient spirit of the holy Joseph.

And having found Christ in His Sacraments, we are to bring word of Him to others, that they may come and worship Him also. Not that Christian men are to make any kind of shew of their own devotion or of God's spiritual mercies to them. That would be strange indeed, seeing we are told not to let our left hand know what our right hand doeth. But these two things we are to do; first, we are in all things to set a good example; our lives, without our seeking it, are to be such, as that others, seeing them, may be encouraged to glorify our God. That is one thing; and the other is, that we are to be very earnest and desirous to have all men true Christians, and most especially those who are in any way put under our charge. So did these Wise men. They did not indeed literally, as Herod desired them. They did not bring him word that the young Child was in such and such a house at Bethlehem. They went away, without returning any answer to Herod at all. And in this, as you know, they were obeying God's voice sent them by an Angel. Being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. But what did they do in their own country? How did they employ themselves? Church history tells us. They became Missionaries, and laid down their lives in the end for Jesus Christ's sake. Having found Christ, i. e., having found pardon and peace, and every good thing, they were not so selfish as to keep

the blessing to themselves; but, as they might not speak of it to Herod, they went home and spoke of it to their own kindred and friends, and so prepared the way for the Churches of our Lord in the East. Such has ever been the way of our Lord's true disciples; for the Love of Him is like a fire, it is sure to spread itself, if it can:—Andrew, when he has seen Christ, will be the first to find his brother Simon, and to bring him also to Jesus, and Philip, when he is called, will bring Nathanael. Well now, brethren? With a good part of us it is, by this time, many years, since we first found that young Child, that Holy Jesus, the Saviour, young and old. In all that time, how much have we done towards bringing others to Him, that they might come and worship Him also? We are, from time to time, put in mind, how that the Church has been so long in the world, and yet so much of the world remains unconverted. It is now eighteen hundred and fifty years, since that glorious Star stood over where the young Child was, and as yet the greater part of the world is sitting in darkness and the shadow of death; the greater part both of East and West has either not heard of Him, or refuses to come and worship Him. We are so used to hear or read this, that we are apt to think very little of it: and when the sad and too true account of it is added, that it is owing to the sins and unworthy ways of those who "profess and call themselves Christians,"—this also we have heard so often, that we take it as a matter of course; and if the truth must be told, we care for it very little. A sad sign, alas! of our love and dutifulness to Him, Who came to save us at the cost of His dearest Heart's Blood,

telling us at the same time, that He died, not for [c] us only, but also for this whole world, which we are content to leave in its sin and unbelief. Put your minds to it, beloved brethren, if it be but for a few moments. Christ "[d] will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." He wills also that men should be converted by the help of one another, and He invites us all by our prayers and alms to bear some little part in this work; us, of this very parish, He invites to add each what we can to the collection for propagating the Gospel, which is made, as you know here, twice in every year. Whoever offers what little he can towards that good end, especially if he rather puts himself out of the way to do so; that person is as the Wise men who, having found the young Child, thought it their duty to "bring word" to others, that they might "come and worship Him also." But are there not many of us who have hitherto passed by this blessed opportunity, this chance of helping to save immortal souls, this honour of working under Christ in His own peculiar work? Yes. Many have passed it by entirely, and others, perhaps, though they do something, yet might well do more if they would. To all such, may we not say, our Lord at this season calls from His cradle at Bethlehem, and says, "Why will you throw away the privilege of giving something to your God? Behold I accept these Wise men's treasures, their gold, frankincense and myrrh; and so will I accept your gold and silver, your pence and half-pence, whatever you give to My servants the Bishops and priests, to help them in their good work of spreading My Gospel."

[c] 1 S. John ii. 2.

[d] 1 Tim. ii. 4.

I say no more on this matter, but only hope that those, who have heard and understood, will think of it seriously, and consider what they should do.

But it is no wonder, if we are slack in offering towards the conversion of the heathen and of strangers, seeing that so few of us have taken real pains to bring their own kinsmen and friends, their own children or servants, their own wives or husbands, to the service of God. We have wished perhaps sometimes to do them good; but we were ashamed in conscience, feeling that we were still, ourselves, under the dominion of some grievous sin. Or we did not like the trouble of watching, reproving, instructing them; or we were cowardly, afraid of giving them offence; or we drew back from that part of our duty, as feeling that if we said much to them, we should be expected to set them a regular good example, and to this we had not as yet, made up our minds. From some such reasons as these, or from mere uncharitable negligence, we have been, most of us, far indeed from bringing others to worship the young Child. It is a sad story, a great deficiency; but the grace of Him, Who was this day manifested, can and will help us to amend it. He can and will strengthen us to overcome all these bad and slothful feelings; to offer abundantly of our substance towards the spreading of the Gospel; and to labour and pray for the spiritual good of all whom God's Providence calls us to help. He can and will keep in our minds the blessing, prepared for those who turn many to righteousness; how that they shall shine as the stars; as the star that shewed the way to Bethlehem, so they shall shine for ever and ever.

SERMON XXXII.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL CHRISTIANS, AND THE SACRIFICES THEY SHOULD OFFER.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

1 S. Pet. ii. 5.

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

The coming of the Wise men of the East, to worship our Lord in His Mother's arms, was, as we all know, a type and token of the conversion of the Gentile Church, the gathering together of all nations to Him: and among the rest, of us Englishmen. For we also are Gentiles, naturally "without hope, and without God in the world," but chosen and called, by God's especial mercy, to be Christians. Therefore this season of Epiphany is one, in which we ought to take especial interest: and if there be any duty, marked out in Holy Scripture as especially meet to be practised by those who have been so freely and graciously called out of darkness into God's marvellous light, we are inexcusable unless we apply ourselves in real earnest to that duty, putting out all our strength to perform it, and praying continually for more strength. There *is* such a duty: and what it is, this same history of

the Wise men clearly informs us. For what was it, which they made haste to do, as soon as ever they had found the Holy Jesus, in His lowliness and Majesty? They "[a] fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold and frankincense and myrrh." They offered unto Him the best they had, or could get: the rarest and choicest treasures of their own land, brought all the way for that very purpose and no other. Ordinary men, when they have gathered gold, use it to make a grand shew in the eyes of their fellowmen; to obtain respect, and have their own way in the world: or to feed their foolish imaginations with thinking much of it; or to obtain this or that enjoyment, on which they have set their minds. But these, the pattern of rich men coming to Christ, had but one use for their gold; to pour it out of their treasures for a free gift at their Saviour's feet. And so with their spices and other precious things. They counted them as nothing, except so far as they might offer them up to Him Who gave them. Why was this? Why had God put it into their hearts? Because, whether those Wise men were distinctly aware of it or no, that little Child was the Most High God, God the Son made Man, in order to give up and sacrifice to the Father, for our sins, "the Body" which He had "prepared for" Him[b]; an Offering ten thousand times more precious than all the gold and jewels, all the spices and incense of the world. And it was but meet and due, nature herself taught, even if God's word did not plainly teach it, that we should offer and sacrifice our best, little though it be, and a mere

[a] S. Matt. ii. 11.

[b] Heb. x. 5.

nothing in comparison, in thankful return for such unspeakable goodness. All this we may learn by looking, with our mind's eye, at the gold and spices of the Wise men, lying on the cottage floor at Bethlehem before the young Child with Mary His Mother; —Mary, whose presence is especially mentioned, as being the sure token of His true Manhood, and perfect gift of Himself to us sinners. As their coming was the type and token of the gathering of the Church, so was their offering, of the Offering of the Church. As they could not bear to appear before the Lord empty, so may we understand that there is no true conversion, no saving approach to our Lord, except we bring Him a true and real Sacrifice.

The Wise men taught this beforehand in action and figure: and after the Kingdom of Heaven was set up, the Apostles, with the whole Church, taught the same plainly in words and deeds. Listen to the holy S. Peter, speaking to all Christians, and especially to us Gentiles. Using a parable, which he had learned of our Lord and of the Prophets, he likens the people of Christ to a consecrated building or temple; a living temple of living stones: and all the life, both in the whole building taken together, and in each separate stone, is due to their being built on to the Corner Stone, Christ. They live—we live—because we are by His Spirit united to Him; for in Him and Him only is Life: and the Spirit, because it joins us to Him, is called the Giver of life.

Well! S. Peter, having told us of this our high and exceeding privilege, goes on and tells us something about our work. "Coming to Christ, as to a living Stone, ye also," saith the Apostle, "as living stones

are built up, a spiritual House:" that is our privilege, and then comes our office and work; "a spiritual House, a holy priesthood." Christians, because they are Temples, are priests; for Christ with Whom they are one, is both: His Body is a Temple, for in It dwelleth all the Fulness of the Godhead; and He called it a Temple, when He challenged the Jews to destroy it, assuring them that in three days He would raise it up. His mystical Body the Church is also a Temple; for in it God the Holy Ghost abideth and dwelleth, according to His promise, for ever. And every Christian is a Temple also, as it is written, "[c] know ye not, that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you?" Therefore, as Christ is a Temple, so are all Christians. But Christ is also a Priest; nay, He is the only true Priest, of Whom all other priests, whatsoever their time and order, whether they followed Aaron or Melchisedec, whether they came before or after their Lord, are nothing more than shadows and types. He is a High Priest for ever, and therefore His people and members, in their measure and degree, are priests also: they are not only a spiritual House but a holy priesthood. That is our office. How are we to exercise it? Why, if we are priests, of course we must have something to offer. For this is the very account and description of a priest, given by S. Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews[d]; "Every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man,"—not Christ only, but whosoever is called a priest, "have somewhat also to offer." In so far then as we are priests, we too must bring our offering.

[c] 1 Cor. vi. 19.

[d] Heb. viii. 3.

And as we are spiritual, i. e., Christian priests, we must bring spiritual, i. e., Christian Sacrifices: not carnal sacrifices, such as were those of the Jews, appointed for a time, as figures and shadows, until Christ the True Sacrifice should come: but spiritual, Christian, Gospel-Sacrifices: such as these we must have, every one of us must have them to offer, because we are, every one of us, Spiritual, Christian, Gospel, priests.

But you will say, "How can that be? seeing there are priests according to our Lord's own law, to whom, through His Apostles, He said, Do this—offer the Holy Communion, '[e] in remembrance of Me.' To no others did He say this, therefore no others could be properly priests of the New Testament, as Aaron and his sons were of the Old. How then does S. Peter here affirm that *all* Christians are a holy priesthood? and how did S. John write concerning us all, He '[f] hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father?'" Surely, even as Moses was commissioned to bear to the whole nation of the Israelites the following message from the mouth of God: "[g] ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Aaron and his sons were priests among the Jews in a particular way: none others might be priests as they were: and yet all the people were priests in a certain sense: they were among other nations as clergymen among persons of other professions, set apart to God's immediate service: they had to take their part in providing and offering to God certain things which He vouchsafed to receive at their hands. As then all the children of Israel

[e] 1 Cor. xi. 24. [f] Rev. i. 6. [g] Ex. xix. 6.

were so far priests to the God of Israel, yet this hindered not but that Aaron's sons had a special commission: so it remains true that the Apostles of our Lord and those who act by authority from them are the only Priests by office in the Church of Christ, yet is each Christian in some sense appointed to somewhat of a priestly work, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

And now, what *are* these sacrifices, these Christian offerings, which our Lord expects of us all? First of all, surely, and by way of sanctifying all, He expects that we should come worthily to that which He has Himself taught us to call His Altar[g]. If your brother hath aught against you, you must be reconciled to him, and then come to the Altar and offer your gift. And again: By Jesus Christ we are to offer "[h] the sacrifice of praise to God continually" at the true Altar, which only Christians may eat of. My brethren, what an honour and blessing, what a Divine and comfortable invitation is this! that our Lord should call us, even the least of us, to be partakers of His Altar, and of the holy service there performed: ministers of "[i] the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." For such we certainly are, as often as we but say, Amen, at the giving of thanks and blessing, wherewith the Priest consecrates the Body and Blood of Christ. We join in the offering; we have part in the spiritual sacrifice: and accordingly when it is over, the Church puts into our mouths this word: we "entirely desire Thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving:"

[g] S. Matt. v. 23. [h] Heb. xiii. 15. [i] Ib. viii. 2.

i. e., this our Holy Eucharist, which we have just taken part in offering. How great a thing is this, when we come to consider it! that we are in spirit and truth, if we communicate worthily, joining not only with the Church of God on earth, but with the Son of God Himself at His Father's Right Hand in heaven: offering, in our measure, the same Memorial Sacrifice, which He, ever since His Ascension, is night and day presenting to His Father. How can we venture to stay away from this? and how can we dare to come unworthily?

There is no doubt that the chief thing, in which Christian people shew themselves priests, is devoutly joining in the Sacrifice of our Lord's Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist: in which one service are, in a manner, gathered together all the good prayers and gifts which at any time they offer to God. Do so then, I beseech you, my brethren, often and most reverently. But take care, when you do so, that, along with the Sacramental Offering, you bring to your Saviour those spiritual offerings, wherewith He has declared Himself well pleased, and which indeed are necessary to make the holy Sacrament a blessing to the receiver, and not a curse. See especially, that you come with bodies either undefiled by sin or purified by true and sufficient penitence. You heard the Apostle's most solemn and earnest warning, just now in the epistle: "[k] I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." No doubt he was thinking particularly of the Sacrifice of Holy Communion; for

[k] Rom. xii. 1.

then and there it is, that Christians especially present their bodies to their God as a living oblation: and you see what alarm he is in, lest they should come there with bodies defiled by sin and not cleansed by penance. Do not so, he says, "I beseech you by the mercies of God:" as much as to say, that all God's mysterious mercy and love which he had been setting forth to them at large; His sending His Son, the Son's dying on the Cross, the Holy Spirit entering into us to join us to Christ and bring us to Heaven; all this great love would be thrown away; it would be their ruin, if they failed in offering to God the sacrifice of chaste and pure bodies. My brethren, this is a mournful subject. Would that I could say something which might really sink into the hearts of all who hear me; something, that might abide with them, and help them in time of temptation: a sort of sting planted in their consciences, to make itself felt if ever they give way to the subtle spirit of uncleanness. Would that all Christians would consider, how shocking it is, that the priests of the Old Law should have been so exact in avoiding whatever might make them outwardly and ceremonially unclean—the touch of a dead body or the like; and, if ever such a thing happened, should have been so careful to purify themselves before they did any thing in their priestly office again: and that Christians on the other hand, being all of them by their calling a sort of priests, should think so lightly as many do of giving way to carnal sins, and so making themselves unfit to communicate. God grant a better, and more Christian mind, to all for whom I am bound to pray!

Another spiritual sacrifice, plainly required of all, and connected also with Holy Communion, is the oblation of religious Alms: concerning which we have a most gracious promise: "[k] To do good and to distribute forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." And what is more, an offering of that kind is called "[l] an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." O joyful, cheering words; words which would go to the very heart of him who has been giving to Christ or His saints for love's sake! to think that the great God, the Giver of all gifts and Redeemer of all men, should acknowledge a kind of welcome fragrance in our poor alms and offerings, if only there be a willing mind! Who would not make haste and entitle himself, if it may be, to such praise as that? praise, which seems in a manner to ascribe, even to the gifts and offerings of poor frail man, some small portion of that Divine favour, with which the Eternal Father regards the Sacrifice of the Son. For both that Sacrifice, and the loving alms of Christian people, are called by the same name, "an odour of a sweet smell," "[m] a sweet-smelling savour."

There is one more spiritual sacrifice and one only, required of all Christians, which I shall now mention: and that is, when God's servants offer to Him with a free will the pains, troubles, wants, sufferings of every sort, which come upon them in the way of Providence, and more especially in the way of duty: like as when S. Paul compared his own bloody death, which he expected, to a drink offering, such as was ordained by the Law. Though "[n] I be offered," says he, though I be

[k] Heb. xiii. 16. [l] Phil. iv. 18. [m] Eph. v. 2. [n] Phil. ii. 17.

poured out as a drink offering, "upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." If his blood were to be poured out in martyrdom, the Father, he knew, would accept it, in union with his Saviour's Blood and for His sake: and therefore he could not but joy and rejoice, when he thought of such a thing as probable, and he called on his friends to joy and rejoice with him. Here, brethren, is a kind of sacrifice, in which we shall all be called sooner or later to follow the great Apostle at whatever distance: and, more than that, we shall be called on to follow his Master and our Master; most of us, in manifold sufferings before we die; all without exception, in death. Why should we not, beforehand, offer up inwardly in our hearts, to Him Who heareth prayer and receiveth sacrifice, both our uncertain sufferings in life and our certain death: willingly submitting ourselves to whatever He may see fit to send on us, and beseeching Him to punish us in time rather than in Eternity; and, if it may be, to sanctify our sufferings, uniting them and us, both in life and death, to the Cross and Passion of our Dear and Gracious Lord.

In all these ways "[o]the merciful and faithful High Priest" has called and will call us to be a sort of priests under Him, sacrificing priests, in His Church. We must join with those who are His priests by office in offering His holy Eucharist; and we must to the best of our power accompany that Sacrifice with the offering of pure bodies, loving alms, and patient sufferings. And as we communicate, so we must try to live. We all know what the word sacri-

[o] Heb. ii. 17.

fice means, when we use it in common talk: mothers, we say, naturally make great sacrifices for their children, or wives and husbands for one another: soldiers sacrifice all for their country and for their duty, and we give them high and deserved honour. Now what our God and Saviour expects of us is, that we should walk towards Him by the same rule: that we should not grudge Him our hundred pence, Who offered on our behalf not only His ten thousand talents, but His very Self, God and Man. Where should we be but for His Sacrifice? How dare we then think it hard; nay, if we be not utterly ungrateful, how can we but rejoice, when we are called on to make some sacrifice for Him?

SERMON XXXIII.

OUR WORTHLESS SACRIFICES TRANSFORMED BY THE GOODNESS OF OUR GOD.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

ISA. lx. 17.

"*For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron.*"

I TRIED to point out to you last Sunday, how that the solemn service of this Epiphany Season is the offering of ourselves to Christ, with all that we have, as a sacrifice of worship and thanksgiving; as the Wise men offered Him gold, frankincense and myrrh, in acknowledgement of the goodness and glory of the Infant Jesus. To-day we are led on to consider, what great encouragement we have, willingly to offer ourselves; inasmuch as God is so very bountiful, and makes so large return for whatever we give Him. As, if there were some great person, some King or Queen, among us, and simple and dutiful people came to him with some little token of loyalty; some trifling present, but the best which they could give, it might happen that the King or Queen might make some great or precious return, some lasting testimony of the pleasure they took in

the gift. They *might* do so; but God *will* certainly do so. The great persons on earth, who last but for a time, may deal bountifully with us, or they may not. But the great King of heaven and earth is sure to deal bountifully with us. What we lay out for Him, He never fails to repay with abundant increase. "[a] He openeth His hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness." Remember His own parable. One of His servants had gained ten pounds, and He made him ruler "[b] over ten cities." Another had gained five pounds, and he was made ruler "over five cities." So large and ample are His recompenses. A city for a pound! So abundantly does He reward His own good and gracious work in us His most unworthy servants!

The words of Isaiah, which you heard just now, seem intended to assure us, among other things, of this overflowing bounty of God, shewn especially to His Church. "Thou shalt know, that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron." As much as to say: "There will be a great change: I will take the things of earth and will turn them into the things of Heaven: I will take the things of the Law and will make them things of the Gospel: I will put a glory about these outward and visible things, so that they shall become pledges and tokens of Mine own inward and spiritual things. Men shall bring Me brass, and I will change it, and give them back gold: iron, and it shall be turned into silver. All that is offered unto Me, shall be

[a] Ps. cxlv. 16. [b] S. Luke xix. 17.

touched as it were with a finger from Heaven, and shall have a new nature and meaning given to it." Or the prophecy may be stated thus. The setting up of our Lord's Kingdom is like the building of a glorious Church or Temple, to which costly offerings are brought by the rich, and meaner offerings by those who can afford no more: and it is here promised, that those meaner offerings shall receive such a blessing from God, as shall turn them into the richer and costlier sort: as it was once said in the Temple, "[c]This poor widow hath given more than they all."

Again, consider the Gospel for this very day. It is the history of our Saviour's first Miracle, how He turned water into wine at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. It was the beginning of all His Miracles; a token, which way they all tended; an earnest and sample of the great work which He came into the world to do, i.e. to change the worse for the better: water to Wine; the Law to the Gospel; sinners into Saints, and men into Angels! So it is all through the Christian Religion, all through the Services and Sacraments of the Holy Catholic Church. Every where, and in all things, the grace of Almighty God is working some miraculous and merciful change, on something or other which men willingly offer to Him. You will see it plainly, if I mention a few principal instances.

How is it in the very beginning of the Christian's life? The father or mother send or bring their young infant to be baptized: they offer him in a manner to God, and He receives him, and gives him

[c] S. Luke xxi. 3.

back to them with such a blessing, that, whereas before he went into Church he was a mere child of Adam, now he is a true member of Christ, truly joined to Him by the Holy Spirit dwelling within him.

Again, consider what we do, and what God does, in the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. The Priest, in the behalf of the whole Christian people, offers to Almighty God, as His Son commanded, Bread and Wine, to be the memorial of the One meritorious Offering upon the Cross. Before it was offered, it was ordinary bread and wine; but the Giver of all goodness returns it back to us with such a blessing, that they who receive it with faithful and prepared hearts, do most truly receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Our Lord opens to us His good treasure, the heavens, and seems to say, "Bring Me here but a little bread and a cup of wine to make that remembrance which I have solemnly appointed, and offer it, as I have directed, with a true and obedient spirit, and I do not say that I will give you this or that good thing, this or that spiritual grace: but I will give you That which is in itself all good things and all spiritual graces together; I will give you Myself, to be 'the strengthening and refreshing of your souls:' 'that your sinful bodies may be made clean by My Body, and your souls washed by My most precious Blood; that you may evermore dwell in Me and I in you.'"

No words, no thoughts of ours, my brethren, no, nor of the Angels in Heaven, (if I may say so) can come up to this exceeding instance of God's Bounty; yet we may and must thankfully acknowledge, that

in respect of all our other sacrifices, all we do and suffer besides, He is the same bountiful God, the same royal Benefactor to us all. Thus, when according to S. Paul's saying we offer our bodies to Him, to be a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is our reasonable service[d]: He promises to give us in return the same bodies, only changed, made glorious and immortal and like unto His glorious Body. What if we had to offer them in martyrdom, the most painful of all sacrifices; to be stoned, sawn asunder, burnt alive, or racked and tormented, like those noble-hearted brethren, of whom we read in the Apocryphal Book of Maccabees? What if we had even to be crucified, as our Lord Himself was? As our agony would be nothing to His, so neither would it be worth speaking of, compared with the joys prepared for us hereafter. Now think, what a help it will be to us, if we try to have these thoughts in pain and sickness. When we lie on our sick bed, tossing this way and that with anguish, and unable to find rest in any posture, what consolation may we not find in remembering that if we bear it well, every moment so spent will be infinitely more than made up to us: it will tend in some unspeakable way to make us happier for ever and ever!

So much for offering our bodies to Christ. Now remember what the Bible says of such as offer Him their alms and estates. Here the Prophet's saying will be as it were literally made good: "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver." The base metals will be changed into the glorious; the mire of the earth into the jewels of Heaven. As it

[d] Rom. xii. 1.

is said by S. James, that misspent money is by no means so cast away, as that the owner shall never hear of it again: rather it will turn into a canker[e], and will eat his flesh as it were fire: so money and goods charitably and justly employed, to the glory of God, and the good of our neighbours and brethren, is laid up in Heaven, it will continue ours for ever, it will multiply and increase into an everlasting stream of wealth.

For our bodies, then, Christ will give us changed bodies, like unto His own: and for our estates He will give us the riches of His Eternal Kingdom. And further, if we give up our earthly pleasures to Him, denying the flesh, and keeping ourselves thoroughly in order, He will make us like unto the Angels, children of God, being children of the Resurrection[f]. Whatever men deny themselves here, for His sake, in the way of transitory and sensual pleasure, He will overpay them in that world, in the plenteousness of His House, in "[g]the fulness of joy" which is in His Presence, and in those pleasures which are at His "Right Hand for evermore."

Sometimes again, God calls on us to offer something still dearer to us than our own lives and bodies. He calls on parents to give up their children, husbands and wives to part from one another, dear friends, who feel as though they could not live in separation, to go on lonely in the world, divided from each other, sometimes by death, sometimes by some yet sadder reason. He puts this upon us, and He bids us bear it, patiently and sweetly, for His sake. Whenever we do so, we make a sacrifice to

[e] S. James v. 1-3. [f] S. Luke xx. 36. [g] Ps. xvi. 12.

Him: a very deep and serious sacrifice, a sacrifice such as our father Abraham made, when in obedience to God's command he offered Isaac his son on the altar[h]. But as Abraham presently received his son back, not now as his dear son only, but as the chosen type and token of his and our Saviour: so whenever a Christian person seriously yields up to the will of God any kinsman or friend who is dear to him, forcing himself for Christ's sake to endure their sufferings, and if need be, parting from them patiently: then the Lord calls, as it were, from heaven, "Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld" thy child, or thy friend, "from Me:" behold I have made thy child or thy friend (if he died in My faith and fear) to be one among the Saints and Angels, who serve Me here in Mine own immediate Presence! Thus in place of an earthly child or friend, a frail being of flesh and blood, who may at any time deceive or forsake us, He gives us an immortal, pure, ever-watchful spirit, to remember us, and pray for us, in that place, where no remembrances are vain, no prayers fall to the ground.

Neither is it a small thing, that if we truly sacrifice our wisdom and learning, our natural sense and skill, what God has given us, to Him Who bids us be humble and meek, and know nothing, "[i] save Jesus Christ and Him crucified:" He will greatly and lovingly reward us, by giving us the happy mind of little children. As *they* have peace and rest in their hearts, casting their care entirely on their nurses and parents: so will the wise and knowing

[h] Heb. xi. 17-19. [i] 1 Cor. ii. 2.

and experienced men of the world, when they have learned in earnest to cast their care upon God. Yes, depend upon it, my brethren, whatever our line of life be, rich or poor, masters or servants, scholars or labourers or tradesmen: whatever be the care or employment, which takes up our mind and time, the way to make ourselves truly wise in it, and to get a blessing upon it, is entirely to sacrifice and offer it up to God. The way to secure our own skill and wisdom, and to make it bear good fruit, is to count it nothing in comparison with that wisdom, which our Saviour gives His saints in gracious reward of their holy and innocent ways. There is a sort of pride and self-reliance, which is apt to grow on us, as we grow older, especially if we have been prosperous, and are esteemed and feel ourselves skilful in our several ways of life. We shall never be truly good and happy, until we have learned to put all this away from us, and to think more, far more, of any simple innocent child, than of ourselves, and all the worldly-wise men of our acquaintance.

But indeed all ages and all conditions of life are alike called to offer themselves tó Him Who made them what they are; all alike are encouraged to hope for an exceeding great reward: what they give up will be surely repaid them, only in infinitely higher perfection. Thus, God invites us to sacrifice all our senses to Him: our eyes, by turning them away, lest they behold vanity[j]: and He encourages us by the great and glorious promises, "[k]Thine eyes shall see the King," Jesus Christ, "in His Beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off:" and

[j] Ps. cxix. 37. [k] Is. xxxiii. 17.

again, "[l] Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God:" and, "[m] We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." He invites us also to sacrifice our ears to Him, by shutting them, that they may not hear evil; and keeping them willingly open to good advice, though it come in the shape of severe warning or reproof. And so doing, He promises them in His own good time, that they shall hear the songs of Angels, and the heavenly harpers harping with their harps before the Great Everlasting Throne[n].

These indeed which I have mentioned, are the final everlasting rewards of sacrifices truly made for the love of Christ. They are too good and perfect for this life; we must wait for them, until we come to the other world. But let us not, even for the present, be at all down-hearted; rather let us assure ourselves, that even in this life, and immediately, God's tokens of mercy are so richly given to His true and faithful servants, that, even in respect of them, it is "gold for brass," wine for water, precious stones for the mere dust of the earth. What is all the merriment and joy, which all the company and amusement of the world can give, compared with the joy of earnest Christians in the holy services, especially the Psalms, of the Church on her great days of thanksgiving? What are even the tenderest affections of life, pure and happy as He causes them to be, when rightly ordered, by His special grace, yet what are they, in comparison with the inward peace and joy in God, that deep sense of abasement and love together, that "humble and contrite heart,"

[l] S. Matt. v. 8. [m] 1 S. John iii. 2. [n] Rev. xiv. 2.

which He vouchsafes not seldom to those who try to come worthily to His Holy Communion. And if the blessings which frail imperfect men and women find themselves blessed with even here, are so far beyond all they can give up, what shall we say of the blessings laid up for us there? A man can but lay his hand upon his mouth, and pray that, by God's exceeding mercy, he may come to see that which now he cannot conceive.

Neither let us, on the other hand, quite forget the horror and danger of our working out the contrary change to this, which the Almighty is so mercifully bringing to pass. *He* is changing brass for gold, water for wine, the flesh for the Spirit, earth for Heaven. What if any of *us*, by our way of life, should be just undoing this work: going back from Heaven to earth, from the Spirit to the flesh, from the gold of Christ's Kingdom to the base metal of the world? As the Prophet describes it in another place. "[o] Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water"—"[p] How is the faithful city become an harlot!"—"[q] How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" O let us, for the short time that remains, cease from working against God: let us pray and strive with all our hearts that His most gracious and sanctifying Spirit may perfect the work which He began in us at Baptism, and make us to be something that He may delight in, for Jesus Christ's sake.

[o] Is. i. 22. [p] Ib. 21. [q] Lam. iv. 1.

SERMON XXXIV.

OUR SACRIFICE OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

HEB. xiii. 15.

"By Him . . . let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name."

WE are, all of us, priests to God and to Christ, and our whole duty and calling, would we rightly consider it, is to sacrifice and give up all to Him. So far as we practise this, so far as we remember God our Saviour in all things, and make it the business of our lives and the joy of our hearts to serve and please Him, just so far are we good and happy; just so far, and no farther. For, as He loved us, so we, according to our measure, are to love Him. As He spared not His own Self and gave up His whole Body and Blood for us all, so are we freely to give up all things to Him; to love Him, as His own word is, with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This is what He taught us by His Perfect Sacrifice on the Cross: as, in figure and mystery, He had taught His people by the burnt-offerings which He had appointed under the Law. A burnt-offering, you know, was offered, when the victim was wholly consumed on the altar

of God; no part left, either for the worshippers or for the priest or for any one else; but the whole in a manner destroyed and done away with, as fire, according to its nature, utterly destroys things: all done away and apparently brought to nothing. Even so did the Man Christ Jesus come to do His Father's Will, and so did He accomplish that Will, when He offered Himself once for all upon the Cross. He poured out His Soul unto death. He kept back nothing from us: and we ought to pour out ourselves, to spend and be spent, for His sake. He grudged us nothing, because He loved us. If we have true love towards Him, we shall never think of keeping back anything from Him. This is the sermon which the Old Testament preaches to us, as often as we read of any person offering up a whole burnt-offering upon the altar of God. And whereas, after all, the best that we can offer is nothing, yea less than nothing and vanity, compared with His goodness and bounty, He will not let us so be discouraged; but promises, as I shewed you last Sunday, by His Prophet, to make our brass gold, and our iron silver, and our wood brass, and our stones iron; that is, to give us, for our earthly things, heavenly; for our temporal things, eternal; for our bread and wine, the Body and Blood of our Lord. Such is sacrifice, and such is God's favour towards those who truly practise it. Now I wish to point out to you one particular kind of sacrifice, which God especially requires of us; the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; such a sacrifice, as that leper offered, of whom you heard in the Gospel just now. After our Lord had cured him, He said unto him, "[a]See

[a] S. Matt. viii. 4, S. Mark i. 44.

thou tell no man, but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer (for thy cleansing) the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." What was the gift that Moses commanded? There were several sacrifices, and, among the rest a meat-offering, that is, a little flour, oil, and honey, partly to be burned on God's altar, partly to be consumed by the priest, as an acknowledgement, that all the fruits of the earth and all good gifts and the power to enjoy them come from God. So it was a thank-offering for the great mercy Christ had shewed him in cleansing him of his loathsome disease. It was a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving on the leper's part, and doubtless Almighty God expects the like sacrifice, in one form or another, from all whom He has cleansed from the worse leprosy of sin, that is, from every one who has been made a member of Christ by Holy Baptism.

We know, almost without being taught, by the very feelings which God puts into our hearts, that we are bound to offer our best thanks to those who have done us good in any way. "[b] It becometh well the just to be thankful." So speaks the Psalmist; and so speaks to every man his own natural heart and conscience. Even the dumb creatures put us to shame when we deal ungratefully with our benefactors: as Holy Scripture notices: "[c] The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." We all know how strange we think it, when we have shewn kindness to a person, and receive no thanks for it. Let us judge by this feeling of our own, how God and His Angels look upon us, when we

[b] Ps. xxxiii. 1. [c] Isa. i. 3.

neglect to be thankful for His great mercies. We know how carefully men teach their children to say, "I thank you," for each casual courtesy and kindness; and how, as soon as they have learned it, they are quick and earnest in teaching the same, each one to those younger than himself. Even if we knew no more than this, we might well understand how natural and reasonable it is, that among our devotions to God should be some kind of thank-offering. And whereas these same are called sacrifices of *praise* also, we may understand that they are intended not only to express the offerer's gratitude, but also to acknowledge the greatness of the Giver: even as we read in many parts of the Bible, how those, who waited on kings and great men, were always expected to bring a present with them, as Jacob's sons to Joseph: not, of course, that the kings had any need of the gifts, but it was reckoned a proper testimony of respect and honour. Not otherwise doth Almighty God receive the humble offerings of His children and servants, having of course no need of them: who could ever dream that He had? And so the Psalm says, "[d] My goods are nothing unto Thee;" but, in His love and in His pity, He accepts what little we can bring to Him, "His own," "out of His own gifts;" as affectionate parents look well-pleased on the simple gifts of their little ones, purchased with money which the parents themselves had given them.

Accordingly, we find, that our heavenly King and Father hath, from the beginning, ordained that His worshippers should approach Him with solemn sacrifices of thanksgiving. Even from the first generation

[d] Ps. xvi. 2.

after Adam, sinful and mortal man has been allowed and invited to "[e]bring presents, and come into the courts" of his God, acknowledging both what God is in Himself, how wonderful, how great, good, and holy, and also what He is to us, our King and Father, our Maker and Preserver, our greatest, and best Benefactor, our only Hope. The firstlings of Abel's flock and Cain's fruits of the earth, whatever other meaning they had, were surely a homage paid to the Majesty of God, and a confession of their debt to Him, for life, and being, and all good things. They were, in action, what the beginning of our glorious Hymn is in words, "We praise Thee, O God: we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship Thee: the Father everlasting." When Noah builded his altar to the Lord, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar, were they not thank-offerings too, for the great mercy which he had just received, of deliverance in the ark, when the rest of mankind had perished? Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, wherever they went, built their altars to the Lord, thereby paying their solemn homage to Him, and owning His mercies continued all their life long unto that day, as well as putting themselves under His protection for the future. And there was much the like meaning in the tithes, which Abram first paid to Melchizedeck, and Jacob afterwards vowed to God, saying, "The Lord shall be my God:" "[f]and of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." The tithes, which God's people in all ages have been accustomed to set apart for holy uses, are indeed a

[e] Ps. xcvi. 8.

[f] Gen. xxviii. 22.

sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Every generation, every person, that hath duly and religiously paid them, the Lord hath smelled a sweet savour in their offering; God hath opened the windows of Heaven, and hath poured a blessing upon them. No man may doubt it; for it is in the very words of Scripture. And "well is that man, and happy shall he be," who, in this our time, be he rich or poor, shall make up his mind to offer the same sacrifice; to give regularly to God, for a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, at least one tenth of his whole income.

Bye and bye came the law of Moses; and then the Almighty was pleased to set down in express words the law concerning offerings of that kind: and great encouragement was given to sincere and devout persons to come continually with such offerings, freely and of their own will, whenever God had bestowed on them any special blessing, or whenever they felt inclined to seek His Face in humble and dutiful worship. Over and over we read of such sacrifice in the Psalms, and find exceeding encouragement and commendation of it. "[g] Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most Highest;" "[h] An offering of a free heart will I give Thee, and praise Thy Name, O Lord: because it is so comfortable;" "[i] Whoso offereth Me thanks and praise, he honoureth Me:" "[k] I will offer in His dwelling an oblation with great gladness: I will sing, and speak praises unto the Lord." And what David thus said and sung, *that* he also practised, and taught his people to practise, more abundantly almost than any of the

[g] Ps. l. 14. [h] Ib. liv. 6. [i] Ib. l. 23.
[k] Ib. xxvii. 7.

saints of old. Very remarkable are the accounts of the great peace-offerings which he offered, when he brought the Ark into its place, and when he had prepared a place for the Temple. And what were all those immense gatherings of gold, silver, and all kinds of materials for building the same Temple, in the gathering whereof all the later years of David's life were employed; what were they but so many peace-offerings, sacrifices of thanksgiving, humble and loyal presents to the Great King, the King of his heart? And David, you will remember, was the man after God's own heart[l]. He was eminently "[m]a cheerful giver:" and such God always loveth.

Such were the sacrifices of thanksgiving under the Law; but as the whole Law was no more to the Gospel, than the shadow of heavenly things to the very image of the things, so we may be sure, it was also in this instance. The Church of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, when it came to be set up in the world, could not be without its sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving: and what was that Sacrifice? Chiefly, and before all else, it was the Holy Eucharist, the Bread and Wine first, and then the Lord's Body and Blood, offered up on the Christian Altar by the priest in the Name of Jesus Christ, for this among other great purposes: that it may be a solemn and perfect acknowledgement of the Great God, and what He has done for us. As such S. Paul speaks of the Holy Eucharist in the last chapter of Hebrews. "We have an altar," he seems to say,—separate and apart from the world; let us go out unto it; let us go out unto Jesus, bearing His Cross; by Him "let

[l] Acts xiii. 22. [m] 2 Cor. ix. 7.

us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name." What is this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, which we are to offer continually to God the Father by Jesus Christ? Not our own words merely, nor merely our own thoughts of thanksgiving; (though our dutiful thoughts and words may by no means be absent from it); but the Christian Sacrifice of praise is the Sacramental Body and Blood, verily and indeed presented to His Father by His priest for a memorial of His Death, as He night and day is presenting His natural Body, to make the same memorial in Heaven. And this is the reason why, in all ages, the Holy Supper has been called the Eucharist; which word means "a sacrifice of thanksgiving." And the more we know and consider the Communion Service, the better we discern, how much of it is taken up with praising God, and giving Him thanks: first of all in the Creed, the Nicene Creed; which, though not in verses, has all the force and meaning of a most glorious and complete Hymn, proclaiming God's glory and His mercy through Jesus Christ, from the beginning to the end. Afterwards, you know, comes a portion of the service, in which we and the Angels present join in the Chant, wherewith the blessed ones in heaven laud and magnify God's glorious Name, evermore praising Him and saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory: Glory be to Thee, O Lord most High." The Angels, always some of them invisibly present in our assemblies, could not join in our penitential service, which comes before this, because they never had any sins to repent of: but

in our thanksgivings they may and do join, because they, no less than we, are indebted to the Lord for all that they are, and have. He is their All, as He is ours: and so they help us to praise Him: and our minds being, as one may say, in tune for the very highest notes of praise, we go on to our most sacred act of adoration and homage: the Offering of the Consecrated Bread and Wine to God the Father. Which being concluded, we presently break into an earnest prayer to Him that He would, "of His fatherly goodness, mercifully accept that our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving:" and then we lift up our voices to Him in another hymn, "Glory be to God on high, and in earth peace, good will towards men;" the same which the Angels sang on earth to the shepherds, the night our Lord was born. And many, I doubt not, have noticed, and it is a comfortable thought, how nearly in that part of the service we copy our Master's doings at the end of the first Eucharist; for then, it is written, "[n] when they had sung an hymn, they went out;" they went out into the Mount of Olives, to do and suffer all that God's mysterious Providence had appointed, or decreed to permit.

Would that we too, my brethren, when we go forth from our blessed Sacrifice of praise, which is indeed the continuation of that which our High Priest then and there offered; would that we too would carry with us the spirit of that holy Service into the world; the spirit of dutiful homage, and the spirit of loving and devout thanksgiving. For the blessed Eucharist ought by no means to be an exception to our daily

[n] S. Matt. xxvi. 30.

life: God forbid! That would be profanation indeed: but what tempers, and affections, and feelings we know to be right at the Holy Altar, the same we are bound continually to practise every where and in all circumstances: like children learning a holy lesson to be said perfectly at solemn times. Is the Holy Communion as a burnt-offering, the whole of which is consumed, and accepted by God, with its sweet savour for Christ's sake, Who is there both to offer and to be offered? Then it becomes us, if we will be worthy communicants, to be continually denying ourselves, and giving up our best and our all to Him. Is the Holy Communion a free-will-offering in the way of prayer, the very intercession of our High Priest here, invisibly present at the Altar, joined and made all one with that which He continually offers in Heaven? Then let us prepare for it, and secure its benefits, by living both before and after it in the habit of regular and earnest prayer. Is the Holy Communion a sin-offering, in that it is the one appointed memorial to God, as well as to man, of the "One perfect and sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation and Satisfaction," for sin made once for all upon the Cross? Then let us, that we may offer it worthily, live constantly in the faith and self-denial of the Cross, and in a deep dread of all wilful sin. Lastly, Is the Holy Communion Christ's Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving? We cannot come worthily to it, be sure, except we practise ourselves, every where and at all times, in homage to our great King and Father, doing all to His glory; and in loving and thanking Him for His exceeding goodness. And I will just mention one way in which you may use

yourselves to this. Consider a moment. I speak as to thoughtful Christians. Why do you come to Church at all? Not for your own good and edification only, though that is a great reason: but it should be no man's sole reason for coming here. Rather believe that God expects you to come also, as an act of devout homage and acknowledgement of Him as your King: as a solemn act of praise. Accustom yourself to come to Church for that purpose; and then every time you come will be a distinct help in preparing you for Holy Communion. Your daily acts of praise will make it, as it were, more natural to you to offer the Sacrifice of praise: just as daily acts of contentment and thankfulness, putting down hard and fretful thoughts, will make you fitter to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving. And then, blessed beyond word or thought will be your Last Communion, which will dismiss you to be for ever employed in praising and thanking, face to face, Him Whom your soul loveth.

SERMON XXXV.

OUR SACRIFICE OF PAIN AND SORROW.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY,

S. MARK vi. 56.

"*Whithersoever He entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment; and as many as touched Him were made whole.*"

WE can understand this very well, as we hear or read it. Many verses in the Bible are hard: but this is very clear and easy, so far, as that we feel at once, how surely we should have done the same as the people of our Lord's time did. If one were now to come among us, and go about from place to place, concerning whom we had good reason to believe, that God had enabled him to cure diseases by a touch, of course we should lose no time, but should make the best of our way to him, if we were in any disease, and should advise our friends to do the same. Wheresoever such a person entered, in villages, or cities, or country, he would find the sick put in his way; men would make haste and ask him to touch them. So far men plainly understand.

But if we consider the thing ever so little, we shall find that we are already even more favoured than those people. We need not wait to see, whether Christ will enter our place. He is already here: we

have Him among us, though invisible. Wheresoever we dwell, in villages, or cities, or country, here in this Christian land, Jesus Christ has entered into that place; He abides in it, by His Church, which He has there set up: and we, if we will, may bring to Him both our own troubles, and those of any of our friends, who are taken with diseases and torments, inward, or outward. We may bring Him these troubles to be pitied and assuaged and healed: or at least to obtain for us grace, that we may bear them patiently and thankfully. He permits us, among other sacrifices, to offer up our fears and our sorrows to Him. "[a]Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall nourish thee." Cast "[b]all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." It is one of the sacrifices of thanksgiving, which He encourages us to offer to Him at this thankful season of Epiphany. As such, I mean to consider it to day: that is, having, on the two former Sundays, shewn you, how we should, with those Wise men, offer our very best to God, and how He, as at Cana, is ready to turn our poor offerings into something truly precious; I shall on this third Sunday speak of the afflictions and miseries of this life, as capable of being offered up, and made an acceptable sacrifice of thanksgiving to Him Who sends all for our good.

And the Church to-day leads us to this way of thinking. First, in the collect: for when we say, "Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities," what do we else, but offer and present our infirmities, that is, our weaknesses of body and mind, to Him the great Physician and

[a] Ps. lv. 23. [b] 1 S. Pet. v. 7.

Comforter, that He may look on them, and heal them? And then we go on, in like manner, to lay before Him our dangers and necessities, beseeching Him "to stretch forth His right Hand to help and defend us." That is, in whatever grief or difficulty we find ourselves, we desire to surrender ourselves entirely to Him: to be helped no otherwise than by His merciful Right Hand, to be stretched forth, when He will and as He will. Thus far the collect may help us in making our cares and troubles a sacrifice to God. And when we go on to the Gospel, we read there of two remarkable examples of persons who did so, and met with great encouragement from our Lord. We read of one person who offered up his own fears and sorrows, and of another who offered up the fears and sorrows of one very dear to him; and Christ graciously accepted both. He who offered up his own affliction, was the leper, who came to our Blessed Lord, beseeching Him, and kneeling down to Him, and saying, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean:" even me, who am most unclean. He knows himself unworthy; yet he offers himself, such as he is, in all his shame and misery, yet in sincere desire to be better, if so be, Christ will heal him, to His own honour and glory. This was a true sacrifice, because he gave himself up so entirely; and our Lord reaching forth His Hand and touching him, and saying, "I will, be thou clean:" was, as it were, the fire of God coming down upon the sacrifice; in token of His being well-pleased with it. And yet what had the leper to offer? Nothing but a body corrupted with loathsome disease, and a soul deeply wounded and weakened by the sins which brought on the dis-

ease. What an offering for the great God of heaven and earth, the Blessed and Almighty One, the God of all Purity and Goodness! Yet He graciously received it, because it was made with a sincere and willing mind.

Again, look at that other worshipper, whom the Gospel to-day sets before us. He presents and offers to his King and God, on His entering into the place where he dwelt, not his own affliction and misery, but the affliction and misery of one who dwelt in his house, and who was evidently very dear to him. When Jesus had entered into Capernaum, there came to Him elders of the Jews, as messengers from a certain Centurion, whose servant was sick of the palsy, and ready to die. What was his offering and present to the glorious Visitor, the great Lord of heaven and earth? "Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." A poor helpless creature on his sick bed, unable to stir hand or foot without extreme pain, him the Centurion brings before our Lord by his prayer, and our Lord accepts it as a good and costly offering, saying at once, "I will come, and heal him." So indeed it was with all those who came themselves, or brought their friends, to Jesus Christ to be healed. The blind offered to Him their blind eyes; the deaf, their sealed ears; the dumb, their speechless lips; the lame, their weak disabled bodies; all the sick and impotent, their weaknesses and sicknesses, that He might lay His Hand upon them, or speak a word to them, and they might be made perfectly whole. Behold here the exceeding mercy of our God! Our fellow-creatures here, when they have done us good, and we try to make them a return, expect some

kindness, some benefit from us: but our good God and Saviour, having come down to do us good, asks no other thank-offering of us, but that we should give ourselves up, our souls, and bodies, to Him, that He may do us more good. Our return to Him must be, to profit and benefit ourselves, as it is beautifully written in the hundred and sixteenth Psalm, "What reward shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits that He hath done unto me?" What indeed? How can I ever do enough, how make any sort of return? Thus man might ask; but hear now the answer of God. "Receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the Name of the Lord." "Receive Him in His Holy Communion, His own Body and Blood, the greatest and most precious gift, that even He can give you in this world: receive Him so, and He will take it for a recompense of all, that He has done to you before." So God, being made Man and going about to visit His people, counted it honour to be everywhere received by the blind and lame, the sick and the paralytic, giving themselves up to Him to be healed.

All these histories then, of our Lord's miraculous doings on earth, when He was in sight of men, are our warrant and encouragement to do with our own troubles, what the men of those days were invited to do with theirs: to bring them all, and pour them out, as it were, before our Lord's fatherly Presence; to lodge them in His merciful Bosom; to submit them to the touch of His healing Hand. As soon as ever a Christian feels any calamity coming upon him, be it of mind of body or of estate, he should presently turn towards our Lord and His Cross, and offer up that calamity, to be sanctified by Him. As

Hezekiah, having received a letter full of bad news and unkind words, did not stay brooding over it at home, but took it into the House of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord; so should we do with all our vexations and troubles. We should lose no time in making them known to God by inward acts of sincere resignation and prayer. Whether it be pain of body or sorrow of heart, loss of money or loss of friends, discredit or disappointment, low spirits or a troubled conscience: whatever the anguish be, the most compassionate Redeemer's word is one and the same, "[c] Come unto Me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." As He had taught His servants to pray before, in the Old Testament, "[d] Whatsoever sore, or whatsoever sickness there be: then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all Thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house: then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways."

Do you not see, my brethren, how much we may learn from all this, of the manner in which God meant His holy worship to do us good? Especially, His worship in this place? Too many of us ignorantly imagine, that certain troubles, especially troubles of mind, are a good reason why they should not be so particular about their prayers. They say, they were so distressed, they had not the heart to come to Church, to the Holy Communion and the like. But Scripture plainly encourages us, when we have

[c] S. Matt. xi. 28. [d] 2 Chr. vi. 28—30.

troubles, to bring them to Church and to Holy Communion, that they may be there made an offering of to God, and truly sanctified by Him; and so, being of themselves but for a moment, may help to work out for the faithful Christian an "[e] exceeding and eternal weight of glory." I know, it is a very hard thing to do; it is a hard thing, when poverty or sickness or reproach seems coming upon you, to rouse yourself up at the appointed hours, and command your thoughts, and practise that calmness, which should always accompany us, when we are speaking to our God. It is hard, but it is most wholesome, both for the present, and for the future: and He, Who prayed all through His own Agony, will not fail to be near with help for those who try in earnest to pray to Him in their agonies.

It is hard, thus to offer up our own troubles to Almighty God: but to many affectionate hearts it is still harder to offer up the troubles of their friends and near kinsmen. They seem as if they could bear it for themselves: but the other is too much for them; it quite unmans them. Yet surely, a man who has faith but ever so little, must feel it the chief of privileges and consolations, to be allowed to make mention of his friends and their troubles before God: to bring those dear to him, one by one, with their several necessities and afflictions, and commit them, by way of surrender and sacrifice, to the safe keeping of Him Who is Faithful, and True: Him Who has said, "[f] Leave thy fatherless children unto Me." Remember, what Holy Scripture tells us of our Lord, when the sick of the palsy was brought to Him by his four friends, and let down through the tiling, couch

[e] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [f] Jer. xlix. 11.

and all, just in front of where our Saviour was teaching. "[g] Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer: thy sins be forgiven thee;" and presently afterwards He said, "[h] Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." Who could wish for or imagine more gracious encouragement to the prayers of intercession, whereby, both at home and in Church, we bring before our pitying Saviour those who are dear to us, one by one, making mention of them in our prayers? I say, making mention of them one by one, if there is time; for it is very desirable to do so; it greatly helps both devotion and charity. But if you have not time, as many perhaps have not, solemnly and always to do this in your prayers, yet you can remember, and accustom yourselves to pray to God inwardly in your heart, for your distressed friends, when you think, as of course you often think, of them. And if you so pray for them sincerely, you are so far like the four friends of the paralytic who let him down before Jesus: or like the good Centurion, when he besought our Lord to come, and heal his servant. You are so far like them, in that you too are bringing the afflictions of your friends before Jesus, as well as you can: and you may have good hope that He will favourably receive such an offering at your hands.

I will conclude with one or two cautions, very necessary to be attended to, if this, our sacrifice of our own and our brethren's troubles, is to be such as God may indeed delight in.

First, it requires some perseverance. A man must keep it up steadily, and not soon grow weary of it.

[g] S. Matt. ix. 2. [h] Ib. 6.

It is not always an easy thing to go on, month after month, week after week, day after day, and that perhaps for many years, still recommending to God the same persons, for the removal of the same troubles, and still to pray faithfully and affectionately. Hope is apt to grow cold, and the heart to sicken of such long waiting, and so that intercession is apt to be left out, or to be said merely as of course. But this is a great pity. Remember God hears our thoughts, and not our words only: and if He does not seem to grant our friends' health, or to remove our own pain or anxiety, yet He may be granting them something better, and keeping something worse from us: and this for aught we know, may depend on our praying in earnest. This then is one caution, "[i] always to pray, and not to faint:" to keep on with the sacrifice, as long as the trouble continues.

Another caution is, that, when the calamity is removed, we should be careful to offer ourselves afresh to God, no less solemnly, in the way of thanksgiving. This also is a rare thing, rare in comparison of what it ought to be. "[k] Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine?" One only out of ten turned back to give glory to God. May His Almighty grace keep us from this great sin of unthankfulness: as also from those other sins of discontent, pride, and impenitence, while the suffering continues upon us. Then will our burthens be turned into blessings: they will become part of the easy yoke and light burthen of our Saviour Christ; if we offer and present them with all our hearts unto God, first, by bearing them sweetly for His sake, and then by giving Him all the glory of our relief.

[i] S. Luke xviii. 1.

[k] Ib. xvii. 17.

SERMON XXXVI.

OUR SACRIFICE OF PENITENCE AND CONTRITION.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Ps. li. 17.

"*The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*"

In the very truth of things, no doubt, there is but one sacrifice, because there is not, nor ever was, more than one Man only, Who had anything of His own to sacrifice, i. e. to give up to Almighty God. That one Man is the Man Christ Jesus, Who, being both God and Man, is the very true and natural Author and Owner of all good things: so that to Him alone it cannot be said, "What hast Thou, which Thou hast not received?" All we the rest, if, by His Grace, we give up our wills or anything else to God, it *is* by His grace that we do so. The will to do it is itself His gift. Christ's Sacrifice and Offering of Himself, when He came into the world saying, "Lo, I come, to do Thy will, O God," and thereafter gave Himself up to suffer on the Cross; that is the only true and perfect Sacrifice. All else, that is called sacrifice; every thing, that either we, or any of the children of men, can offer, is only acceptable, as far as it is united to the perfect Oblation of our only Lord and Saviour, offered once for all, upon His true and perfect Altar, the Cross.

But so gracious and bountiful is our God, as to

shut out nothing whatever, which is ours, from the benefit and blessing of being so sacrificed. All that we are, and all that we have, if we will bring it rightly to Christ, He will receive it at our hands, will bless it, and will offer it for us to His Father; and the Father will mercifully accept it for His Son's sake. I gave you an instance of this, last Sunday, in that which S. Paul calls "the sacrifice of praise," "the fruit of our lips, giving thanks unto His Name." What are all our praises, and thanksgivings to Almighty God? How is He the better for them? Yet He vouchsafes to be well-pleased with them; "to smell a sweet savour," when they are presented before Him in a dutiful and obedient spirit. So it was in old time, when our father, Noah, offered up the first burnt-offerings for his and our deliverance in the ark; and afterwards, when faithful Israelites paid their vows and thank-offerings according to the Law. So it is much more in our Christian days, when the Church brings her great Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, and offers It before the Father as Christ Himself commanded, saying, "Do this in remembrance of Me." Of this kind of Sacrifice, the Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, I said something last Sunday. Now let us consider, what Holy Scripture says of another sacrifice, no less needed on our part, and no less acceptable to Almighty God, especially when it is offered in Holy Communion, along with Christ's own heavenly and prevailing Intercession: I mean that, of which the Prophet David speaks in the great penitential Psalm, "The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt *Thou* not despise." That is to say, that when we

come before our God to make Him an offering in any way, we must take care to come in a very deep and humble sense of our own sin and unworthiness. We must confess our own shame, as well as His glory. The word "confess," both in the Scripture and the Prayer Book, applies to both these. We speak of confessing our sins, and of confessing the Faith. When we confess the Faith, as in the Creeds and in the Te Deum, of course we are giving glory to God. We are acknowledging how great and perfect He is in Himself, how wonderful and good to us. When we confess our sins, then also we are giving glory to God: as Joshua said to Achan, "[a] My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now, what thou hast done; I pray thee, hide it not from me." Confessing sin is giving glory to God, because it is owning Him to be what He is, All-knowing, and All-holy: whereas, when people hide their sins, it is as much as to say, "Either God does not know what I have done, or He is not holy enough to care much for it." Confession then is accepted by Him, as an acceptable sacrifice for Christ's sake, whether it be confession of His Goodness, or of our own sin and nothingness. And the sin or trespass-offering in the old law was a type and token of our confession of sin, as the burnt-offering and meat-offering was of our acknowledging His goodness, and giving up all for a thank-offering to Him. Therefore in every sin-offering the rule was, that the person who had sinned, and brought the offering, be it ram or bullock or goat or whatever it was, should lay his hands upon its head, before it was sacrificed, signifying

[a] Josh. vii. 19.

that on it, in type and shadow, were to be laid the sins of the person; whereby it was prefigured, (whether people thought of it or no) how the sins of the whole world should one day be laid on Christ our Saviour. Thus was glory given to God in the old sacrifices, both in confession of sins committed, and in confession of mercies received. And not less, but more, infinitely much more was glory given to Him in the Perfect Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ on the Cross, by confession in both these kinds. For what confession of sins can equal this, which the Only-Begotten made, in offering Himself to the Father, as the Only Sacrifice, which could at all come up to the enormity of man's offences? And what confession of mercies might ever compare with the aweful and blessed word, "It is finished," spoken, as it was, by the Redeemer, in the very moment that He was completing our Redemption by His Death?

Of course then, as the two kinds of confession were in perfection in the Sacrifice of the Cross, we might expect to find them in the very image of that Sacrifice, offered continually in the Eucharist. Accordingly, as all communicants know, the Lord's Supper is never celebrated without most solemn acknowledgment of our own sins, as well as of our Master's glory. Indeed the confession of sins comes first. We all kneel, and humble ourselves in words, as sorrowful as words can be. "We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought word and deed, against Thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly Thy wrath

and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings: the remembrance of them is grievous unto us: the burden of them is intolerable." Thus we offer to our God the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart, before we venture to offer Him the other Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving! which we do upon the Priest's summons, "Lift up your hearts," joining in the very song which the Cherubim and Seraphim sing continually in Heaven. For even the Angels join with us in the Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, but we are not worthy to join with them, until we have first prepared ourselves by that other sacrifice of humble and contrite confession.

But, whether our confession of sins be offered in this most solemn of all services, or whether it mingle, as it always should, with our ordinary prayers and meditations; it will do our souls no good, nor will it at all please our Maker, unless it be accompanied with true contrition of heart. And what is contrition? "A bruised and broken heart:" "a troubled spirit," troubled, not with ordinary sorrow, but with a godly sorrow working repentance unto salvation. For not all sorrow for sin is contrition, or at all godly: as you will presently understand, if you will consider for one moment. Suppose one went into a school or family, and saw a child, crying apart from the rest, and were told it had been doing wrong, and was just about to be punished; you would not at once conclude, that the child was penitent, though it was crying never so bitterly: it might very likely only be afraid of punishment. But if you saw the same child, after he was forgiven, vexing himself,

and behaving sorrowfully in remembrance of his fault, and declining perhaps, as feeling himself unworthy, to join the play and merriment of the other children, you would say he was really a thoughtful penitent child, and would feel sure he was in the way of amendment. Now this sort of difference, continually to be seen in children, may very well help us to understand the distinction, in God's sight, between true contrition, and the mere sorrow of the world. Pharaoh was vexed and sorry for what he had done to the children of Israel, when he felt the scourge of the Almighty, destroying his harvest, his cattle, and his children. But there was nothing of true penitence in him; his sorrow was entirely for what he suffered, not at all from any sense of his sin: his heart was yet altogether hardened. Again, we read, how the wicked king Ahab, having heard from the Prophet Elijah most fearful threatenings of the judgements that should come upon him, how that "him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat, and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat;" Ahab, I say, having heard this, was exceedingly troubled; he fasted and wore sackcloth and went softly. Was this true contrition? No. There was a kind of faith in it, but there was no love. There was a kind of faith; for Ahab would not have mourned, if he had not believed the Prophet's saying: but there was no love, for it led to no repentance or amendment. Ahab's sorrow was mere fright; he was like a child that expects to be punished: and, though God gave him a chance, allowing him time to improve his fear into something like religious reverence, he refused to be the better

for it. Alas, how many of us have much reason to fear, that very much of our decent behaviour and abstinence from gross sin has no more in it of what pleases God, than Ahab's fasting and sackcloth had.

But again: there is a sort of vexation and disgust and remorse at a man's own sin and the misery into which it is bringing him, which, though in a certain sense it may be called sorrow for sin, is yet the very farthest possible from godly sorrow and contrition. Remember Judas Iscariot, my brethren; when his sin was finished, and about to cause his Master's death, he hated himself for it, but instead of seeking mercy, where even he might have then found it, he departed, and went and hanged himself. Beware, my brethren, if unhappily you have grievously sinned, beware of being so disgusted at your own sins, as to forget your merciful Saviour, and so fall into despair. When your soul is disquieted within you at the remembrance of what you have done amiss, think with yourself, Who it is that is touching your heart with such anxiety. It can only be the All-merciful God Who willeth not your death, but rather that you should be converted, and live. It is a token of the Good Shepherd even now on His way to find you out. If that thought really enters into your heart, surely your grief and shame cannot be without some touch of love towards Him: and where love is, though but in the faintest spark, there is the beginning of true contrition: the hard heart is beginning to give way; bye and bye, we may well hope, it will be a broken heart, a troubled spirit, such a sacrifice as God will not despise.

Now since it is a very common thing indeed for

persons who have done wrong, not only to profess' but to feel a real sorrow for having done so; a real wish, that they had done otherwise: it is good to be aware of some tokens, whereby we may discern, whether our sorrow be that of a contrite heart or no. For why should we go on deceiving ourselves, and imagining that all is right before God, when perhaps the next temptation will shew, that we are just as fond of our sin as ever; only frightened for a time, not at all really converted from it?

One token, then, of the broken and contrite heart which God hath promised not to despise, is, when the sinner, as Moses and Ezekiel say, accepts the punishment of his iniquity: i. e. when he takes it kindly from God, however painful and irksome it may be: when he acknowledges not in word only but in thought, that he has deserved all this and worse, and ought not for a moment to wonder at its coming upon him: when he tries and tries to be even thankful for any punishment, however sore, which is laid upon him to endure in this world, hoping that it may all come upon him here, to his greater comfort and refreshment hereafter. True contrition, if you will but follow its teaching, will keep you from complaining, either of the quantity or kind of punishment, which your wise and loving Father sees to be best for you. If it touch you in a tender point, you will the more reverently acknowledge the Hand of *Him* Who knoweth the very secrets of your heart. If it come in the first instance from man, you will nevertheless accept it, as if it came directly from God: knowing, as our Lord said, that man can have no power at all against

you, except it be given him from above. I wish we thought more than we do of this. For I fear there are many, who would be ashamed openly to murmur, when their trouble comes directly from God, and yet they feel themselves quite at liberty to be cross and discontented and say hard words, if their sufferings come through their fellow men. Such persons greatly deceive themselves, if they think they are at all true penitents.

And so do those, who are clever at all kinds of excuses, and have them, as the saying is, at their fingers' ends, when they have done anything amiss. Such persons may be, in a way, sorry: but it is yet far from godly sorrow; it has nothing to do with sincere, genuine repentance. It is more like that first natural shame, not of the eating but of the nakedness, which caused Adam and his wife to hide themselves from the voice of the Lord God. And as Adam shewed that he was not, at first, really sincere in his repentance, by trying to throw the blame on his wife, so we hear alas! every day, the like excuses from Christian men women and children; and when we hear them, we take them as an infallible sign, that the persons so excusing themselves, are far from true repentance and amendment.

But he, in whose mind and heart the sacrifice of God, a troubled spirit, has at all begun to be offered, will fear nothing so much as any kind of untruth in his penitence. He will say to himself, "This is my last hope, truly to repent. To be indeed broken-hearted for the grievous sins I have committed, is indeed the very plank, which must save my soul from shipwreck, if it be saved at all. To blemish

therefore my penitence with wilful falsehood will be choosing a rotten plank, instead of a sound one; it will be madly throwing away my last hope." The broken and contrite heart will not let a person endure to have more credit given him than he deserves; it will not let him say good words for the purpose of seeming to others more penitent than he really is; neither will it suffer him to give way to anger when he is told repeatedly of any fault, as many, desirous to be accounted good penitents, do. Again, a truly contrite person will not be too much affronted, even when charges utterly false are brought against him; he will say, as penitent David did[c], when Shimei charged him with treason to the house of Saul, to which he had always been particularly dutiful: "[c] Let him curse because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." "I have deserved it" (so the penitent will say to himself) "for other sins; how free soever I am from what he charges me with."

In a word the signs of contrition are, truth, patience, submission to blame, and an earnest desire to spend and be spent for Christ's sake all through your future life. If you have sinned, and have not these signs, indeed you are in a bad way. God help you; you have no time to lose. But if you have these signs; if you always speak the truth; if you take severe usage patiently from God or man; if you never look out for excuses, and if your rule, for the time to come, be to walk before God in reverent obedience, then you are a happy penitent: the Angels are even now rejoicing over you, and a home is preparing for you in Heaven: only persevere.

[c] 2 Sam. xvi. 10.

SERMON XXXVII.

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF OUR LORD AT NAZARETH, RENEWED IN HIS SECRET PRESENCE NOW.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

1 S. John iii. 1.

"The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not."

What a wonderful history is that, my brethren, which we just now heard in the Gospel! how that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, went down from Jerusalem to Nazareth with those who were called His Parents, and was subject unto them for eighteen years, the very prime of His human life, from twelve years old to thirty. For so long it was, before He came out of His retirement, and preached and wrought miracles, beginning from His Baptism by S. John. All that time He did no miracle; He preached not to the people; He came not at all into public; He exercised no part either of His Prophetic or of His Priestly Office. But His very quietness and retirement, when you come to think on it seriously, may well seem more astonishing than the greatest of miracles.

We may picture it to ourselves in this way: Holy Scripture teaches us to do so. Our Lord at the end

of this day's Gospel, goes down from Jerusalem to Nazareth: and there abides, as He had abode before, in a very quiet homely way of life, with Joseph and His Mother, who were poor and simple persons. Nazareth was a place of no consequence among the Jews: it was very meanly thought of, insomuch that they had a proverb, "[a] Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" It was an out of the way place, and not a very large one: it was in no wise a place, in which anything out of the common would be looked for. However, had you or I been living in that town of Nazareth a little more than eighteen hundred years ago, we should have been aware of a young man, abiding in the house of a poor carpenter named Joseph, who had a wife called Mary: and this young man generally passed for the Son of Joseph and Mary. His name, we should of course have known, was Jesus: but that name, when it was heard among the Jews, did not by any means bring with it the same tender yet aweful thoughts, which it does, when Christians hear it. It was then a very ordinary name, such as John or Thomas among us. It had no special religious sound in the ears of those, who heard it applied to our Lord, when a young man at Nazareth. Well! at Nazareth this Jesus abode, as the son of a poor carpenter; so poor that, when his wife was on the point of being delivered of her Infant, away from her home, Joseph could not afford to find her a better lodging than a poor stable. Joseph was a poor carpenter, and Jesus, we have sufficient reason to believe, did Himself work at that trade in the days of His youth and early manhood. He was called by

[a] S. John i. 46.

some who thought meanly of Him, the Carpenter: "[b] Is not this the Carpenter, the Son of Mary?" He got His bread then, as any other young man might, by labouring in His father's trade: as one among several who were called His brothers and sisters: whether they were children of Joseph by a former wife, or whether (which seems more likely) they were our Lord's first cousins, children of His mother's sister, and called His brethren, as the manner sometimes was. And so, when we find Him called the Carpenter, the Son of Mary, we may well imagine that, Joseph being dead, our Lord lived alone with His Mother, and very likely maintained her by His own daily labour. However, as I said, had you or I lived at Nazareth during those eighteen years, we might have daily seen Him moving about as a young Carpenter, going to His work in the morning, or returning from it at night: carrying His tools (so we may imagine Him) as any other tradesman might: and I suppose we should have looked upon Him as a young person of a very pure and holy character, temperate, quiet, upright, loving and dutiful, perhaps beyond any one whom we knew: as one increasing "[c] in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man:" perhaps too we might have known that He was remarkable for obedience to His parents; as it is written, He "[d] was subject unto them." But little indeed should we have dreamed, Who He was in earnest. For all the while this poor tradesman, this simple, innocent, hardworking youth, was the Great God of Heaven and earth, come down from Heaven to earth and made Man, made Flesh for us.

[b] S. Mark vi. 3. [c] S. Luke ii. 52. [d] Ib. 51.

He was in the world, which world was made by Him, and that world knew Him not. Nobody was aware of His greatness, not even His own Mother: at least so it would seem from what we heard just now in the Gospel, that neither she nor S. Joseph understood the saying, which He spake unto them, Did ye not know "[e]that I must be about My Father's business?" I say, it would seem from this, that not even the Blessed Mary did at that time quite understand, that her holy Child Jesus was the Eternal Son of God: only she felt and knew that He was the promised Seed; something very great, the true Salvation of God. And she thought very much of it: "[f]Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." Over and over again she pondered all the wonderful things that had happened; the Angel appearing to Zacharias; the miraculous conception of John the Baptist, with a declaration that, great as he was, he was only to prepare the way of One greater than himself; Mary's own unspotted and wonderful Conception, with the message of the Angel announcing it; the babe leaping in Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's salutation, when she, having now conceived Jesus Christ, came to visit Elizabeth; the miracles at the birth of John, and still more at our Lord's Birth; and especially that unheard-of miracle, that she herself became a Virgin Mother. She could not forget the Angels appearing to the shepherds, nor the star appearing to the Wise men, nor the flight into Egypt and return, all under direction of an Angel: nor her own Magnificat, nor the Angel's Hymn, nor the prophecies of Zacharias, Simeon and Anna: and

[e] S. Luke ii. 49. [f] Ib. 19.

all was brought freshly back into her mind by the doings and sayings of her Son at the feast of the Passover, when He was twelve years old. Our Lord's brethren, His kinsmen in general, seem to have forgotten or slighted all these: "[g] for neither did His brethren believe in Him," and when His mighty works were going on, "[h] they said, He is beside Himself." His brethren thought little of Him, but His Mother diligently observed it all: she let none of His words, none of God's warnings concerning Him, fall to the ground: and so by degrees she was prepared both to believe in His full glory, when it was made known to her, and to endure the sight of His Sufferings, the sword which was to pierce through her own soul also. His Mother knew Him, but the world knew Him not. To ordinary people, all those eighteen years, He was nothing more than a poor, good, holy, young tradesman. Is there not something very, very aweful in the thought of thus meeting the Great Lord and Judge of all, of actually seeing Him day by day, watching Him as He moved along, discerning His features, which way He looked, and how; hearing Him speak, and having the chance to treasure up every word, and the very tones of His voice: and all the while not having the least suspicion, Whom they were seeing, to Whom they were listening: as His forerunner, S. John the Baptist, told them not very long after: "[i] There standeth One among you, Whom ye know not." Fearful, thrilling, amazing is the thought, thus in our Flesh to have seen God and not to have known Him! The Patriarch Jacob knew

[g] S. John vii. 5. [h] S. Mark iii. 21.

[i] S. John i. 26.

something of it, when he waked up at Bethel, and said, "[k] Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven." And still more perhaps, when, after wrestling all night with the mysterious Angel, he acknowledged, "[l] I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

It may be, my brethren, that we ourselves have more reason than at first we might think, to tremble as Jacob did, or as those must have trembled, who, having known Christ after the flesh, came afterwards to be aware, how high and dreadful He is, beyond all thought. For the wonderful history of our Lord's silence and retirement seems in one way to come home to us all, to be indeed the history of every one of us Christians. Inasmuch as we are members of Christ, truly united to Him in Holy Baptism, we are in the sight of God, so many "Christs," so many sons of God. God, and the spirits which are nearer God than we are, when they look down upon us from heaven, discern in us something very different from what men, like ourselves, behold. Men, as we move about in their sight, perceive what we are outwardly; our features, forms, dress, behaviour: they are aware of one another's birth, education, station, character: they notice the turns of our good and evil fortune, the chief things that happen to us outwardly, as inhabitants of this world. This is what men see in one another. But the All-seeing, and His holy Angels, and those who, having faith, see things by His true Light, *they* are aware of a great deal more than this.

[k] Gen. xxviii. 16, 17. [l] Ib. xxxii. 30.

To them is open a whole world of truths concerning our spiritual condition, which the unbelieving cannot at all dream of. As the beloved Disciple says, "The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." It knoweth not Christians, because it knew not Christ. E. g., a little child is brought into the Church to be christened; and what a change is wrought in it! As the Catechism plainly says, it goes in a child of wrath, being by nature born in sin: but it goes out, having been by Baptism made a child of grace. A boy goes to school: the bodily eye, the unbelieving thought sees in that boy just a good or bad scholar, an idle or industrious child, one who is likely to prosper in the world, or to fail. But the Angels see in him one marked with the sign of the Cross, just entering the field, in which he is to contend against Evil spirits, the prize being his own never-dying soul: they see in each little Christian child, in school or in play, something that reminds them of the Child Jesus in Jerusalem or in Nazareth; something very high and holy; something which the world knows not, cares not for, because it knew Him not, but for which He cares so much, that He came down and died for it. Christian parents, have you all of you considered this? Have you, like the blessed Mary, that pattern of mothers, kept all these things and pondered them in your heart? Have you taken account of the Lord's exceeding mercies shewn, one after another, upon these little ones, so dear to you and to Him: of His grace given them in Baptism, and His mark set on them; and what a thing it will be, if through your carelessness, your false teaching, your bad example, one of these should finally perish; one member of

Christ become the servant of sin? Do you not see, how full of anxiety that Holy Mother was, when she had, by no fault of her own, lost sight of her precious Child for that one day? with what care and trembling she turned back to Jerusalem, and for three days sought Him sorrowing? And can you be easy, while you see with your eyes, and hear with your ears, the evil words and works of your children? Are you not afraid to let them choose their own company, and go their own ways? What will you say bye and bye, when the Great Shepherd shall come and say, "I trusted you with so many lambs, they were all marked with My name; I gathered them into My fold, and left you to take charge of them: where are they now? What has become of them? Why did you permit this Christian youth to associate with those who were sure to teach him profane words and unchaste ways? Why did you leave that Christian maiden, free to wander up and down, to learn what bold ways she pleased, of whom she pleased?" It is sad enough that Christ should be every where around us; every where in every house, in every baptized soul and body, and any of us should fail to know Him and own His Presence in their brethren. But tenfold surely is the sadness, when fathers and mothers cannot or will not see the Lord's Image in the fruit of their own body: when they make light of their childrens' grievous offences, saying, "It always was so, and it cannot be helped:" or when, like old Eli, they just say now and then, "[m] Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear," without in earnest interfering, and shewing themselves serious.

[m] 1 Sam. ii. 24.

Worldly parents, and men of the world in general, little indeed do they know of the exceeding dignity of every Christian as a member of Christ and a child of God. But our Mother, the Church, knows a great deal of it: as did our Saviour's holy Mother about Him. The Church knows what it is to be God's child, and we know and feel it, in such measure as we enter into the mind of the Church, which is the mind of Christ. Pray, that you may do so: pray to be helped to think much of the exceeding worth and dignity of precious souls, especially of souls baptized and born again in Christ: both your own and others which may be committed to your charge. For your own and your children's sake, keep all Christ's sayings in your heart, but especially that one, in which He says, "[n] What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" and that other, in which He declares, "Whoso shall be the cause of sin to one of these little ones which believe in Me," (i.e., to any Christian child) "[o] it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." May He by His great mercy keep us from incurring this sentence!

[n] S. Mark viii. 36.

[o] S. Matt. xviii. 6.

SERMON XXXVIII.

HUMILITY.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Rom. xii. 3.

"*I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*"

S. Paul, in this part of the Epistle to the Romans, having finished what he had to say of the mercies of God, begins to speak particularly of the duties we owe to God, the ways in which we are to shew ourselves thankful. So the Church, having fully set before us the exceeding mercies, which we yearly remember on Christmas Day and the other great days of this season, proceeds, in the Epistles for these Sundays after the Epiphany, to tell us what manner of persons we ought to be, for whom so great things have been done and suffered by the great Almighty God Himself. The first is purity: "to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God;" and to keep our minds from being conformed to the world. The next is that which is set down in the

text: "not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think."

Now this, every one would say at once, is a plain rule of common sense. It speaks for itself. Why should it be necessary for the Apostle to enforce it so earnestly? Why should he say it, through the grace given unto him; i. e., why should he beg them to observe that he says it by the special grace of the Holy Ghost, which he had from God as one of Christ's Apostles, as though what he says were something very hard, extraordinary, and wonderful? And yet it is simply, that a man should know his own self: as if one should say, "Look in the glass, and mark and see what sort of countenance you have."

The truth is, it is extremely difficult for any man to judge himself aright: just as S. James remarks, that it is hard for him, looking with his bodily eyes on his own face in a glass, to bear in mind, when he is gone away, what manner of man he is. All men, I suppose, have experienced this; that they do not know their own countenances nearly so well as they know those of some others. Depend upon it, it is much harder to know our hearts and minds truly. It is infinitely hard for each one of us, naturally, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. Naturally, we neither know God nor ourselves. We know not God, how good and perfect He is: and not knowing His perfection, we cannot judge rightly of our own sad and fallen state: just as a person who had never seen any thing that was thoroughly white and clean, would have small chance of knowing how filthy and impure he might himself have become by long neglect. But if you

bring him near the bright snow, or a pure white robe, then he will see the difference, and perhaps be ashamed of it.

For this reason, there was far more excuse for the heathen of old thinking well of themselves, than for Christians now doing the same. The heathen had not seen the Almighty and All-Perfect God, made Man and dwelling among us, and setting us that wonderful example of all that is pure, and loving, and holy. The heathen children had never heard of the Son of the Most High, how He became a little Child, and how He was subject to His parents. The heathen youths could not yet be told of Jesus, when He was twelve years of age, how He delighted in His heavenly Father's House, in hearing and asking questions about heavenly things. The heathen young men, if they were restless and disobedient, wild and wanton and resolved to please themselves, could not be put to shame with the remembrance of One, Who being King of Angels and men, abode contentedly in the home of His reputed father, working with His own Hands at a poor trade, humbly and dutifully obeying His Mother and Joseph, little thought of, and seeking no earthly reward, for the space of near thirty years. And all the while, had He chosen to take them, the pomps and treasures of the whole world were at His command. By this you may understand how great helps are given to us Christians in the Life and Death of our Lord, infinitely more than what heathens could have, to know what is holy and unholy; what real goodness is, and how it looks, when it comes among men: and therefore, how much more mad and foolish it must be in any one of us to pride

ourselves on our poor performances, than it was in any of them.

Yet, foolish and insane as it is, it is what we are all continually practising. Notwithstanding all the light we have from our Lord's own perfect example, and from the holy, though infinitely lower, examples of His Saints, we are for ever tempted to praise ourselves in our hearts. Nobody, who has ever set to work to examine himself as a Christian, can possibly help being aware of this. Therefore S. Paul seems here to teach, that thinking soberly of ourselves is the great standard and measure of a Christian's grace. "I say to every man that is among you, to think soberly of himself, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." As much as to say, that the more faith and grace a man has, the more soberly will he think of himself. For faith shews him the true Light, whereby he discerns his own dimness and darkness. Grace causes him to love and long for his Saviour, and so to be more and more distressed at the evil which is in himself and in his ways, whereby he is kept at a distance from Christ.

The holiest and most saintly person, then, is he who thinks most lowly of himself: and the reason why we are not all humble and lowly is, because we are not really trying to be good. Who among men is the greatest of Saints? Who is especially known by the name of Blessed; a name assigned by the Holy Spirit Himself? Is it not the Virgin Mother of our Lord and our God? and that, because being His Mother, she has been brought nearer to Him than any other created being. Now the Spirit which filled her, in the Hymn which we daily rehearse,

has told us what her thoughts of herself were. It was her lowliness, which God regarded. He exalted her, as being especially humble and meek. We see it remarkably in her behaviour, when the Angel brought her that wonderful message from Heaven, "[a] Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." Instead of being at all lifted up, she was troubled at his saying, and wondered what it could mean. How free must that Blessed Maiden have been from those proud unholy whisperings, which the Evil one commonly breathes into our hearts, when we are praised for any kind of goodness! How high and holy must her thoughts have been, concerning Almighty God and His Goodness, when after all the purity and holiness of her life she felt nothing but trouble and amaze at being praised even by an Angel!

Considering this great instance, we may the less wonder at what Scripture plainly teaches, that all the Saints, all who shall be saved, will be surprised at the strangeness of their own salvation—will wonder how such as they are should be favoured with such unspeakable love. Our Lord gives us plainly to understand this, in that aweful picture of the great Day of Judgement[b]. He warns us, that when He shall say to them that are on His right Hand, "Come, ye blessed of My Father; for I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat: they shall answer and say unto Him, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered and fed Thee?" They had done indeed such things, but with no notion how very blessed they were: it had seemed to them a matter of course, to relieve a poor

[a] S. Luke i. 28. [b] S. Matt. xxv. 34, 35.

man in distress: little thought had they, that in so doing they were laying their God under an obligation, as He would graciously reckon it: yet behold what it comes to in the end. "You have given meat and drink and clothing: you have visited the sick; come now, inherit the Kingdom." What a thought is here, to encourage men in all good works! that Christ our Lord, for His own Love's Sake, is providing for them all an infinite reward, and preparing the doers of them, in some secret way, to receive that reward: that the alms men give for Christ's sake surely turn to treasure in Heaven, the fasting they practise, to fulness at the heavenly Table, their purity and command of their senses, to the more open sight of God. But the more entirely men believe and set their hearts upon this, the less can they understand, how such mean and scanty works, as they know their own to be, should be recompensed with such a reward. And thus it will come to pass in that Day, that many who are last in their own account will be found first in the account of the Judge. And the parable will be fulfilled, which describes our Lord as the Master of a feast, inviting His humble guests to a place far nearer Himself[c]. He that is going to sit down in the lowest room, we can understand how he must be astonished, believing not for joy, and wondering, when he hears the condescending words, "Friend, come up higher." He that came back to his Father with the words in his mouth, I "[d] am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants:" how far beyond his expectation was it, when he saw his Father coming to meet

[c] S. Luke xiv. 10.

[d] Ib. xv. 19.

him, when he felt his fatherly embrace, when he heard him bid them, "Bring out the best robe."

Thus has our Lord Himself described holy persons and true penitents. You may know them by their humble and lowly opinion of themselves. May we not well fear, recollecting how very differently from all this we have been used to consider our ways? When we have been led in some sort to examine ourselves, and go over past time, how far too easily in general have we been satisfied with our own doings! What credit have we given ourselves for good intentions, from which we know we have miserably fallen away: or again, perhaps, for good done, though in truth we had not purposed it! How little have we troubled ourselves on purity of thought! How have we forgotten, or remembered almost without care, thousands of evil words, which have escaped our lips! And how, on the other hand, have we praised ourselves in our heart, and loved to have others praise us, for every little spark and fragment of good! When we remember all this, and try to put it together in our conscience, surely we have reason to think with fear of that other and more fearful amaze, which our Lord foretells will be felt by many in that Day. When He has said, "Depart from Me," they will say to Him, "When saw we Thee in trouble and did not minister unto Thee?" They have been so used to forget Christ, that it never occurred to them that, in neglecting their poor brethren, they were doing an unkindness to Him. They will find to their horror, that their sins were as much worse than they had imagined them to be, as Heaven is higher than earth; Christ, against Whom they had

sinned, than a mere man. And as to their good deeds, their prayers and Holy Communions, on which they had depended for saving them, whilst they went on in mortal sin: He has warned us too plainly, what the end of them all will be. They will say, "[e] we have eaten and drunk in Thy Presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets;" we have heard Thy Word, we have come near and partaken of Thy Holy Table. But He will answer and say unto them, "[f] I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

Assuredly, my brethren, there is great need for our thinking more than we do of this very startling truth: that many, not to say all, both of the saved and of the lost, will be surprised at their own sentence. Well may it make us tremble to read, that it is possible for persons so to deceive themselves, as to live and die and meet their Judge with what they think perfect assurance of salvation, and yet it shall be said to them, "I never knew you." Well may it render us watchful and anxious, when we read or hear of holy persons on their death-beds, still more, if God, in His great mercy, allows us to be present at any such, and when we compare their repentance with our own: they, overflowing with love to God, and deeply grieving to have offended so good a Father, so gracious a Saviour, so holy a Comforter; we, so far as we have repented, moved too often by the mere dread of what we may suffer: they, examining themselves deeply, earnestly confessing to God their whole past lives, reproaching themselves, that they have forgotten so much; we, hurrying over such painful thoughts, and getting rid of them as fast as

[e] S. Luke xiii. 26. [f] S. Matt. vii. 23.

we can: they, not parting with the thought of their sins, but continuing all their lives long to punish and vex themselves for them, one way or another; we, too soon persuading ourselves, that we have repented enough, that now all is right, and we may take our ease, may eat, drink, and be merry. Well may we pray as that royal Penitent did, "[g] Make me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me:" "[h] a broken and contrite heart Thou wilt not despise." Well may we, evening by evening, examine ourselves more jealously, not only *what* we have done, but *how*, and *why*. It may have been granted to some of us to be present in the sickness and death of very innocent, very saintly persons; and to be amazed at their contrite and humble words and ways. Let us bless God for it, treasure up these recollections, and beseech Him, that they may bear good fruit in us. What if we were one and all, this night, seriously to represent to ourselves the holiest departure we have seen, or heard, or read of: and to consider, what chance there is of our death bed being like that? Let us take to ourselves, as well we may, the severe words which the Saints have uttered of themselves in their humility. In no case let it be said of us, "[i] The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart."

[g] Ps. li. 10. [h] Ib. 17. [i] Isa. lvii. 1.

SERMON XXXIX.

THE HUMBLE CHRISTIAN'S WITNESS FOR CHRIST.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

S. MATT. v. 16.

"*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.*"

THIS is the Season of Epiphany: and a very holy Season it is: very holy, and very instructive. I only wish we thought more of it, and gave ourselves up, far more entirely than we do, to the good resolutions, and solemn prayers and thanksgivings, which naturally go along with it. As it is, I must with shame and sorrow confess, that in this parish, (for I will not speak of others) this yearly feast of our Lord and Saviour is, by almost every one, passed by with utter indifference; as if no one had anything to do with it, except the five or six, ten or twenty, who are used to go to Church on week-days. All of us, who have any religion at all, think a good deal of Christmas and Easter: a good many reverence Whitsuntide: but as to Epiphany, it should seem that the greater part know not what it means: they do not know that it is the day appointed for thanking Christ that He has manifested Himself to us Gentiles: it is our thanksgiving-day, appointed for us to appear

each one before God, and thank Him for not leaving us in darkness and the shadow of death. Surely men do not know this, otherwise they would not pass over so blessed a day in utter disrespect and negligence. I own it does make me ashamed and sorry, when I think of so many Christian persons, as were assembled round this Church yesterday, just in service-time; and hardly any of them had so much thought as to come into the congregation, and join in praising God for making his Saviour known to him. They were waiting there; the Church-doors were open; but hardly any of them thought it worth while to go in. It may be, some of them are here to-day: if so, I am in some hope that they are attending to what I say, and that they will consider, whether their heart can be quite right towards God. The thing in itself may seem trifling, a matter of course; but if you really come to ponder it over, I think you will own, that it is a token of something wrong. God grant us to amend in this and all other respects, and to keep the holy times, as they come round, each one better than the last!

With regard to this holy time of Epiphany in particular; one great lesson for us all to learn of it is this: that as Christ hath shone upon us, so He expects us to shine out before men. For the very meaning of this word Epiphany is, "shining upon;" a bright light manifesting itself to those, from whom, before, it was hidden. Now we know that when anything bright, and especially when the sun shines upon another thing, there is always more or less of what we call "reflection." The body which is shone upon does, as it were, give back the light: it shews

the brighter itself for the light falling on it. So it is in regard of this spiritual light, Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, the True Light of our souls. When He shines upon any soul, He expects that soul to drink in His rays, and grow bright by them, and by degrees to be conformed to His own likeness. Accordingly the Prophet Isaiah, when he calls on the Church to rejoice in the coming of our Saviour, speaks to her thus, "[a] Arise, shine; for thy Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Observe, he says not only *Arise*, but *Shine*. We are not only to awake from our long sleep of sin and carelessness, but we are to receive and give back the bright glory of the Sun which wakens us up. Not only is the Glory of the Lord risen upon us, but it is also to be "seen upon" us. As the Jewish people were to be "a holy nation, a peculiar people," known from all other sorts of men, by their being more pure in comparison, and nearer to God, so and much more are Christians to be marked out from the rest of the world, as loving God and their brethren, and keeping all the commandments.

Only, as no one would ever make such a mistake, as to attribute the brightness of the sun, not to the sun itself, but to the thing shone upon, so must we all take good care not to praise ourselves, nor to seek others' praise, for any good thing which the grace of God may have put into us, but to give all the glory entirely to Him: saying with S. Paul, and that from our very hearts, "[b] Not I, but the grace of God which was with me." None but a very young

[a] Isa. lx. 1. [b] 1 Cor. xv. 10.

child would ever imagine, that the bright image of the sun, seen in a looking-glass or in the water, came from the glass or water, and not from the sun itself. So none but one who was perfectly childish in the understanding of spiritual things, would give himself credit for any virtue or excellency which was in him, instead of acknowledging that it is "[c]from above," and floweth "down from the Father of lights."

Here then is a double duty to be thought of and practised continually by all Christians. On the one hand, they must be not only good, but exemplary: the light that is in them is not meant to be hidden, but to shine out, and shew itself glorious before their brethren: on the other hand, it is so to shine, that persons seeing it may glorify, not us but God. This way of comsidering the Christian rule of life is well suited to the time of Epiphany: and it is of so great consequence, that our Lord (as you heard to-day in the second Lesson) put it almost before everything else in the Sermon on the Mount: and our Church again puts it first in the sentences, wherewith she prepares us for Holy Communion. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." Here very plainly are both the duties I have been speaking of. Our light is to shine before men; they are to see our good works: that is the first thing: but how? so as to have their minds turned, not towards us, to praise and admire us, but towards God, to honour and adore Him. Seeing our good works, they are to glorify our Father which is

[c] S. James i. 17.

in Heaven. Good Christians, as S. Paul somewhere teaches, are to be the very glory of Christ.

Our light is to shine before men, because we are none of us to live and die to ourselves: we are none of us to go on, as if we had our own souls only to save. Rather, when we were made Christians, we became parts of a great and manifold Body, The Kingdom of Heaven, the Body of Christ, which is so joined and compacted together, that "[d] whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." And this Body or Kingdom is not to mind itself alone: it has a great commission, a great work to do in the world: it is, as our Lord teaches, the salt of the earth: that is, Christians are put into this world for this purpose among others, that they may keep it from becoming utterly rotten and corrupt; that their doctrine and good example may, like salt in a piece of meat, spread by degrees over the whole, and sink into every part, preserving all, and giving its own flavour to all. And how is this to be done? Chiefly by others taking notice of their holy and happy ways of going on: as our Saviour goes on to say, "Ye are the light of the world:" "ye are as a city set on a hill:" ye are as a lamp in a house, which when the master has lighted, he does not presently turn a bushel-measure, or any other vessel, over it, but he puts it, of course, on a candlestick, "that it may give light to all that are in the house." In all these ways our Master declares to us His purpose, that Christians should be exemplary: adding in the well-known words of our text, So, that is, as a candle

[d] 1 Cor. xii. 26.

on a candlestick, I ordain that your light may shine before men. He does not bid them take pains, in doing good, that others may know it: but He bids them lead such lives, that, without their thinking of it, others may be won to goodness by them. This, He gives us to understand, is the common calling of all Christians; to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the city set on an hill, the lamp in the house. By their good and wise behaviour they are to spread their Master's kingdom, and silently and gradually to prevail on the wicked to repent and turn to God: and therefore, as they are not to make a shew of their own goodness, so neither are they on any account to shrink from declaring themselves on God's side, to be ashamed of Christ, or to encourage men in sin or in carelessness. I say, to be openly on God's side, and not on the devil's side, in every thing; to take Christ's part altogether in the perpetual war between Him and the spirits of darkness: this is the common calling of all Christians: and as in the beginning of the Gospel there was danger of their neglecting it because of persecution, so now and in all times we are tempted to swerve from it by our own selfish fancies. Men say and think, Why should I be so particular? Why should I try to remember Christ in *every* thing? Why must I for ever be considering, how my words and deeds will appear to others, who are outwardly nothing to me? Why may I not please myself, and let my neighbours and acquaintance take care of their own souls? Now this, in fact, is Cain's question, "[e] Am I my brother's keeper?" Only it is more shocking in us

[e] Gen. iv. 9.

Christians than in Cain, because we belong to Him Who bought us with His own Blood for this very purpose, that we might be members one of another through Him: that we might love one another as He loved us: that, if need be, we might even lay down our own lives for the brethren. If we are to be ready to lay down our lives for them, how dare we help to destroy their souls by setting them a bad example, by encouraging them to think lightly of their duty to God?

Remember the man who was cast into outer darkness, because, having but one talent, he hid it, and made no use of it. Whatever our place and station be, we have at least each of us one talent: we have the power of choosing, whether we will serve God or no, openly and before men: if we, through sloth or cowardice or love of any worldly thing, fail to make this only right choice, we too are unprofitable servants: we have not glorified our Master: therefore in the end He will turn away His Face from us: and where His Face is turned away, there can be nothing but outer darkness.

Our Church, as I said, sets our Lord's rule about letting our light shine before men, in the very forefront, as it were, of her Communion Service: just at the beginning of the Offertory: they are the first words to those especially, who intend to stay to the Communion. One reason for this, no doubt, is to encourage and hearten them up in the very public and solemn profession, which they make of their good mind towards Christ by the very act of staying to the Communion. As times go, to be a regular communicant, especially if a person be young, or

much out in the world, requires a truer and more courageous heart, than many of us as yet possess. Too many have such relations, such companions, and alas! have hitherto been so slothful and negligent, that, if they were now to begin coming duly to the Altar of our Lord, they know it would be no small trial to them, in the way of mockery and scorn and other disrespectful talk. This, no doubt, is one reason, why we find so many of Christ's flock unwilling to be fed in this His own choice Pasture: why it is so hard to bring persons to Holy Communion, even after they have seemed to take real interest in their Confirmation: and why it is often still harder to bring them a second time, than it was the first. No doubt they, many times, find that they have to bear the scorn of their foolish acquaintance, acting in this respect as true messengers of Satan. When a young person has communicated, these unhappy people point at him, and remark on it, and in various ways contrive to make him uneasy about it, and it too often ends in his never coming again. Others again, who are not young and do not so much fear being ridiculed, are yet unwilling to come, because they know that, in coming, they make a strict profession of religion; and they do not want, they say, to set themselves up as better than their neighbours. And others, who come with really dutiful hearts, are yet, it may be, over much afraid, lest there should be something unreal and untrue in their coming: the sense of unworthiness hangs so sadly about them, that they are almost ready to draw back from any solemn profession of loyalty to Christ, and most especially from the holy Sacrament, the most solemn

of all. Now to all these sorts of backward communicants our Mother the Church repeats our Lord's warning, "Let your light shine before men," as plainly as a lamp shines in a house: you must not draw back for fear of their seeing your good works: true, you are weak and frail, you have done many wrong things, and they may, some of them, begin to talk rudely and unkindly, when they are told of your coming here: but nevertheless come: as in former times, you were not alas! ashamed to sin with them, so now be not ashamed to repent openly in their sight: be as bold and courageous on Christ's side now, as you once were on the devil's side. Never mind the pain of being scorned, or of being blamed, perhaps, as a hypocrite; rather take such annoyance thankfully, as a slight penitential suffering for your old bad ways: and above all things strive and pray, that having once made a beginning, God may not so give you over to the mean cowardice of your own hearts, as that you should leave off so blessed a custom on account of what foolish and ungodly people may say.

And this will hold in other things, besides your attendance on Holy Communion. For instance, the too common fault which I first spoke of this morning, neglect of such days as this of Epiphany, is in a great measure owing, I am sure, to the timidity of good sort of people: they wish to serve God, and they know in their hearts that it must be good to serve Him as the Prayer Book directs, but they have not the courage to set about it, because it is in some respects a new thing, and it is more or less unpleasant to them to think what sort of remarks may be made

on it. I wish such good sort of persons would for once seriously consider, whether our Lord may not have had *them*, their very selves, in His mind, when He set down this law for us all, "Let your light shine before men." They may think, they are serving Him as well at home; but are they doing as much for the fulfilment of His declared purpose, that His people should be as salt, to communicate their good things to others? as a City on an hill, which no man can help seeing? as a Light to the whole world? as a Lamp shining through all the House? Are they not, so far, behaving as if they were ashamed of Christ, and encouraging others in their several ways to behave so?

A thoroughly good and enlightened believer will not indeed neglect any duty of his station, in order to wait on God the oftener in Sacraments and Church Services: he will remember that our Lord said, He would have mercy rather than Sacrifice. But he will take care that it is a true call of duty, not a fancy of his own, nor a false shame towards men, which keeps him at any time from meeting Christ where He promised to be. Idle talk, scornful jests, foolish companions, little inconveniences:—none of these things surely will have power to keep him from the Presence, much less from the Table, of his Great God and Saviour. Yet again he will take care that he serves not God for the praise of men; that he comes not here to be thought well of; nor to keep up a high notion of himself, which he may have secretly suffered to grow in his heart. He will not leave off his good works, but he will so order them, to the best of his judgement, as that men, seeing them, shall give

all the glory to God. When the thought of men's praise comes in, he will shrink from it, and be always trying to dislike it. Thus trying always to do right, but always blaming himself for not doing it well enough, he shall at last, by his Saviour's unspeakable mercy, hear the words which he now scarcely dares hope shall be ever spoken to him: "'Well done, good and faithful servant."

It is true that both the duties, which have now been urged upon you, are troublesome: both will require exceeding care and pains and self-denial all our lives' long. If our light is to shine before men, we must walk constantly and openly in all the ways of good men: if all the glory of this is to go on to God, none at all to stay with ourselves, we must ever watch and pray and repent; we must be ever practising contrition for what is and has been amiss in us. It *will* be troublesome: but who would mind the trouble, seeing that the end, by His grace, will be, that, as the light of such persons hath shone before men on earth, so they shall hereafter shine as the Sun, as Jesus Christ Himself,—for they shall be made like Him—in the Kingdom of their Father, and before the Angels of God?

[f] S. Matt. xxv. 21.

SERMON XL.

BE NOT CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ROM. xii. 2.

"*Be not conformed to this world.*"

WHATEVER else you do or neglect to do, when you come into a Church, there is one thing, my brethren, that you are most of you particular about, and that is your dress. You are, in general, careful not to come here on a Sunday, unwashen or with mean and dirty clothing. So much so, that as you well know, (and I am sorry to say it,) a good many stay away from God's House, get into a habit of staying away, for no other reason, (as they themselves declare) than because they are without seemly and decent apparel to come in. That of course is carrying the matter too far; for Almighty God, as you all know, looks not on the clothes, but on the heart. Nevertheless, it is so far right, in that nature herself teaches you to be as respectful to God as you can, to offer unto Him all your best: and to wear one's best clothing is, we know, a token of respect, just as coming wilfully and carelessly in an unclean and dirty condition is a kind of insult, as far as it goes. Therefore you are right to come here as clean and decent as ever you can: clean and decent in dress and in person. But do you

not see, dear brethren, what follows with regard to your heart and soul and conscience? Remember S. Paul's saying "[a] having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." What will it avail you to have your bodies well washed with pure water, if your hearts be not also sprinkled from an evil conscience? "Tell me," says a holy Father, "[b] wouldst thou choose to come to the Sacrifice with unwashen hands? I suppose not. Thou wouldst rather not come at all, than come with soiled hands. How then darest thou to come with thy soul impure and unclean, and so venture to touch the Lord's Body?" So might it be said to you, every time you come into Church. You make a point of coming in decency of body and clothing; what a pity, if you make no point of being decent in heart and behaviour! You are entering into the House of God: you do not come wearing your work-day clothes, the dress that is stained with the mire of this ordinary world: but what signifies that, if you take no care to purify your hearts? "[c] Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?"

This lesson, which the Church preaches to you every Sunday as you come into it, she preaches at this time of Epiphany by the voice of the holy Apostle, crying out and saying, "[d] I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." *Therefore*, i.e., because of something. Because of what? Because of the mercies of God, of which he had been putting them in mind through all the eleven chapters of this Epistle.

[a] Heb. x. 22. [b] S. Chrys. Hom. iii. on Ephes. p. 132. O. T.
[c] S. Matt. xxii. 12. [d] Rom. xii. 1.

Because, while you were yet sinners, Christ died for you all: because He gave you His Holy Spirit in Baptism, to unite you one by one to Himself: because, having reconciled you to Himself by the Death of His Son, His mind is, if you do not hinder Him, to save you to the uttermost by His Life. These are His mercies: how are you to receive them? You are to present your own bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God," in and with that Holy Sacrament, in which our High Priest presents His crucified and risen Body to the Father, so interceding for us, not only in Heaven but on earth: and this is your "reasonable service;" the sacrifice, not of dumb creatures without understanding, but of your own living souls and bodies in union with the Body of Christ. This is the return our Lord expects of us for all His exceeding love: He requires of us to be worthy communicants, or at least to be in earnest preparing ourselves for Holy Communion. But how are you to know whether you are in earnest, and worthy, or in a way to be so? Listen to S. Paul just a moment more, and he will tell you quite plainly. He will say to you, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind;" that is, (for so the word "conformed" properly means in this place), do not draw near to Christ's holy Altar Table, while in your heart you are still wearing the dress, the uniform, the livery of this present evil world; while you are suiting yourselves to it in form and fashion, in thought, word, and deed. This is the Temple of the Living God: it will not do to stay here, worshipping Mammon or Belial. When you come in at that door, you must do your best to

leave the world behind you: even as when you were joined to our Lord in Holy Baptism you did openly renounce the world, with all its pomps and vanities: you called it "this wicked world," and vowed to have nothing to do with it. Does it seem hard to you to keep that vow? Are you inclined to turn away from those who press it upon you? If Almighty God were even now to send down the blessed Apostle to speak to you in person, as he does speak to you by his voice in the Church, should you not, in the bottom of your hearts, wish to be out of hearing and about something else? and *that*, for fear of being told to give up some pleasure or profit that you had set your heart upon? for fear of being convinced that you are in the wrong way, the way that leadeth to destruction; for fear of having your eyes opened, of being made to see, that there must be a great, a lasting change in you, if ever you are to be happy with Christ in Heaven? Alas, is there not much reason to fear, that many, if invited to hear S. Paul himself, would find some excuse, like Ahab of old, who had rather not resort to God's Prophet, because his conscience told him, that he could not prophesy good of him, but evil? Is there no one here even now, whose conscience tells him, that if his favourite sin were to be preached against, he would rather wish to get up and leave the Church, than to think seriously of repenting and amending that sin? And yet the pleasure of your sin, whatever it be, is but for a short season. It is part of the fashion of this world, that passeth away. It will be gone, for ever gone, perhaps in a very few days or hours, certainly in a certain number of years. The pleasure, I mean, will be gone: but as for the sin,

there it will be, a deep black burning mark, perhaps in your body, assuredly in your soul, for ever and ever, incurable, unassuageable. Had you not better apply yourself in earnest to cleanse your wedding garment while there is yet time, however hard and painful the task may be at first?

But you will say, some of you, We are no such grievous sinners, we never committed murder, adultery, fornication: we are not profane swearers, nor thieves, nor open scorners of holy things. Well, my brethren, it may be all very true, and yet our Lord, looking on you with those eyes which are as a flame of fire, may see that your hearts and lives are wholly conformed to this world: that if this were the time of the flood, you ought not to be found with faithful Noah, but with those, who went on "[d] eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the Ark; and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away:" or if you had been neighbours to Lot in Sodom, you would have been one of those, to whom Lot seemed as a mocker, because he said, God will destroy this place: though the Angels came to call you away, your hearts would have been still set upon the pomps and gaieties of that wicked place. God may see all this in your heart, though you be not what men commonly call wicked. You may be sure, He does see it, unless you by His grace have learned to love Him more than these; more than any of the things of this world; more than anything which passes away. Out of mere common sense, my brethren, we had need renounce the world, since it is so sure to renounce us

[d] S. Matt. xxiv. 38, 39.

before long: to pass away, all that we desire in it, and leave us as though it had never been: leave us in our sins, to meet our God face to face.

Again, you had need, in your heart and will, turn away from the world, because it is the enemy of God. So says S. James, our Lord's brother, "[e]know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." The world, the wicked world, the band and company of those who are yet in their sins, is at war with Christ; and His saints are at war with them: you cannot be a friend of both: you cannot in this matter halt between two opinions: the Voice from heaven says plainly to you, "[f] If the Lord be God, follow Him." How vain is it for you then, my brethren, to fancy that it is well enough, if most of the people about you praise and think well of you! How can you possibly tell that these companions of yours, who speak well of you and are glad to see you, may not be themselves soldiers in the enemy's camp, not in Christ's; slaves of the devil; citizens of that evil country so far from the Father of all goodness, where the poor Prodigal "[g] would fain have filled his belly with the husks, that the swine did eat." How can you tell but such and such a pleasant companion may be one of that evil world, concerning which the Holy Ghost saith, it all, the whole of it, "lieth in wickedness?" You are sure he is so, if you see him habitually and regularly breaking any one of God's plain commandments; if you know him to be a swearer, a drunkard, unchaste,

[e] S. James iv. 4. [f] 1 Kgs. xviii. 21.
[g] S. Luke xv. 16.

a scorner of holy things, dishonest, a liar, or the like. Be kind, my brethren, to all, and judge them as favourably as you can: but trust no man to be your friend, whom you know to be given to any of these bad things: else you will be so far a friend of the wicked, and of course an enemy of God, of Christ.

An enemy, my brethren, of Christ! What a saying is that! an enemy to our Good Shepherd, to Him Who came down from Heaven, that He might become one of us, and die for us! an enemy, such as those who stood round His Cross, and scorned, and as it were crucfied Him afresh! how like you the notion of being such an one? And yet you are so, and as such you are set down in God's Book, if you go on setting your poor weak and wicked heart upon this vain world, to deliver you from which He died. For so the Apostle again teaches: He "[h] gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world." What an unspeakable shame and pity, that, when we are delivered, we should throw ourselves wilfully back, like the Israelites putting their trust in Egypt; or as if any of those whom God's Providence has delivered from the worst of earthly dangers, should, madly and against warning, rush back into those very dangers, putting their heads into the lion's mouth again, after they had been once plucked out of it.

And, now I have made mention of the lion, there is another thing never to be forgotten, as long as we are on our trial in this life: as long as we are tempted back to the world which we have renounced. Who, my brethren, is the prince, the king, in some sense

[h] Gal. i. 4.

the owner and proprietor of this wicked world? Who is "the ruler of the darkness of this world?" Is it not Satan, your enemy and Christ's? And you, in giving yourself up to the world, in making it your business to enjoy yourself as much as you can, to get all men to speak well of you, to heap up gold as the mire of the streets; what are you doing, if the very truth must be told? You are selling yourselves anew to be slaves of Satan; you will be found bearing his mark, when his servants shall be finally separated from Christ's; and then what can the end be, but that your home, alas, must be with Satan, and you must wear his chain, the chain of darkness, for ever!

And now, how may each one judge for himself, whether he is in this sad way, the broad road which leadeth unto destruction, or no? Of course, if any one is allowing himself in what the Prayer Book calls, "notorious sin," i.e., sin, of which no Christian can doubt that it is serious and deadly sin: if he never pray, never go to Church, if he be a scorner of God, or of his parents, a blasphemer, a fornicator, a thief, a slanderer, a liar; he must know at once, without further question, that he is "conformed to this world:" and he must know also, without repentance what will become of him. But many of those, whom our Lord has taught us to call children of this world, are not such notorious sinners. How are they to become aware of their danger? I will mention a few marks out of Holy Scripture: and may God's good Spirit help us to apply them, each one to himself when there is need!

You may suspect yourself to be a child of this world, when you find yourself taking pride in your

own skill and wisdom: like those to whom holy Job uttered by the Spirit those words of reproof, "[i] No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you." For the Gospel says plainly, "[k] Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

The next mark of a man's not having thoroughly renounced the world is a still plainer one. It is this: "Is your heart so set upon any thing here in this present life, that the thought of the world to come is unpleasant and irksome to you?" I do not mean, shrinking from death and judgement; the best of men may well do that, considering his own faults and God's aweful presence: but what I mean is, when a person is so entirely taken up with his property, pursuits, schemes and employments in this world, innocent though they may be and useful in themselves; that he is more in earnest about them, than about his devotions and the preparation of his soul for death. Such an one has much need to watch and pray that he enter not into temptation; to pray that he may pray better; to meditate often, every day a little, on the great and aweful things to come, Death, Judgement, Heaven or Hell: lest by little and little he fall away, and become a thorough child of this world, before he is aware.

Again, be sure the world is getting or keeping too much hold of you, when you cannot bear being scorned or ridiculed for doing what you know in your heart to be right. This is especially a temptation of the world, because it is a temptation from our fellow

[i] Job xii. 2. [k] 1 Cor. iii. 18.

mortals, not from Satan: and because it is so entirely *without* a man. For example: you are, we will suppose, a young man among other young men: and the Lord has shewn you, and made you understand, why He gave you a Bible to read, a Church to go to, Holy Communion to receive. But you, being, as I said, a young man among other young men, are sorely tempted to act contrary to your convictions in these great things. You know God gave you your Bible that you should read and obey it; your Church, that you should worship in it devoutly and regularly: Holy Communion, that you should be a constant, worthy receiver. You have no doubt of all this: but you are afraid to practise it, or even to have it known that you care for it. Why? Because your companions, some or all of them, will laugh at you. My dear young friend, whoever you are, ask God to give you a manly and courageous heart, that you may put down such a foolish, timid thought at once. The laughter you shrink from, is a mere sound in the air. It can do you no harm, no more than the wind murmuring in the trees, if you will just begin to disregard it, and go on, as if you did not hear it. Do you so for Christ's sake, once and again and the third time, and see if it does not presently begin to bring you a great blessing.

And take notice, I beg you, of what I am going to say last. When, by God's grace, you have made such a good beginning, do not presently allow the devil to flatter you with a notion that all is right, you being now, as you hope, a little better than the rest, and not ashamed of it. No doubt that wicked one will be at hand, trying so to deceive and spoil

you; but do not you listen to him. Turn away from the proud thought, and from him who is trying to put it into you; and turn towards the meek and lowly Jesus, Who has helped you so far. Be not proud of your little goodness, but be heartily ashamed that you are no better; and beg of Him, with all your might, to untie the chains that as yet bind you to this world. That is a prayer which He is sure to hear: and He will bless and answer it, transforming you more and more into the likeness of Himself, by giving you "a new heart and a new spirit," that you may not only hear and read, but feel and know by a happy experience, "what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." May He grant you all this blessing for His dear Son's sake!

SERMON XLI.

PATIENCE.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

S. JOHN ii. 4.

"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."

"[a] HE that believeth shall not make haste:" i.e. he will not hurry on before God's Providence, nor, in what seems to himself zeal, transgress the law of holy obedience and humility; but will suffer Almighty God to do His own work in His own time. This, as I have tried to shew you, is a general law of God's kingdom, and rule of His saints; and it is especially shewn forth to us in the little which Holy Scripture relates of the childhood and youth of our Divine Saviour. The more we think of His mysterious abode at Nazareth, as a poor working-man, during twenty-eight years, the more may we well feel ashamed of our own impatience, and bow down in silence before Him, in Whose Hand all times are.

The Gospel for this second Sunday after Epiphany carrying us on to a second stage of our Lord's manifestation of Himself, leads us also to observe in *it* the

[a] Isa. xxviii. 16.

like holy composure, if it may be so called, and exact keeping of the law, which He had laid down for Himself. I call it the second stage of our Lord's Epiphany, because, as He before manifested Himself to Joseph and still more to His Blessed Mother in the Temple, after a manner which, however plain to those two, would not be understood by ordinary bystanders, who knew nothing of the secrets of the family; so it appears to have been in this case also. He "[b] manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him;" but it does not appear that any others, except the slaves that drew the water, were at all aware of the miracle. Thus gradual was His way of revealing Himself; first to those of His own Household; then to the few, who in honesty of heart had joined themselves to Him; and not until afterwards to the ordinary Jews at Jerusalem.

Again, the whole order of this miracle itself was such as to set strongly before considerate Christians the duty of waiting on God's Providence, instead of pretending to run before it; of following His lead, instead of striking out paths of our own. For first, our Lord did not in any visible way make, Himself, an occasion for this miracle: humanly speaking, it was made for Him. He had indeed just been promising, that from that time forward those who believed in Him should see "[c]Heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man," thereby leading them to expect some bright and dazzling sign to their bodily eyes, such as Jacob and Daniel had seen in their prophetic dreams: yet went He quietly on, without any out-

[b] S. John ii. 11. [c] Ib. i. 51.

ward miracle, for three days, and, when the first miracle did occur, it was not apparently from any plan of His, but incidentally, and as we should say, by the bye, to meet an unforeseen need. For how stands the history? He came to the marriage by invitation, His Mother, it seems, being already there: and in the course of the marriage feast, which took place according to ordinary custom, the wine happened, as we should say, to fall short. His Mother naturally took notice of this, and He seemed at first to put her off: but there happening to be there a number of stone cisterns for water, for washing at the meal, as the custom of the Jews was, He had them filled with water, which He silently, by His Almighty power, changed into wine. Do you not see, how all was done as nearly as might be in the ordinary course of Providence? partly, no doubt, in order to teach us, that He Who wrought these things, was no other than He Who directs the ordinary course of Providence; for as an old Saint and Bishop of the Church has said, "[d] He Who then made the water wine, in those six waterpots of stone, does the same every year, in every vine that bears fruit in the whole world. Just as what the servants put into the waterpots was changed into wine by the Lord's working, so what the clouds pour out is turned into wine by the working of the same Lord." The quiet manner of our Lord's miraculous power thus visibly breaking out, may remind us that He is the God, Who made and upholds heaven and earth, and Who, in all the things which we use to call natural, is near us at all times, near even to His worst enemies, and to those

[d] S. Aug. in S. Joan. Tract. 8. n. 1.

who most entirely forget Him. Nor can we know, what secret miracles He may at any moment be working, for our sake or upon us, any more than the Governor of the feast knew, whence the wine was, which our Lord had silently made out of the water.

This then may be *one* reason for the course and manner of our Lord's first miracle; and surely it is not unlikely that *another* may be, that which I before mentioned, viz., that we might all learn patience and composure, in what we do and suffer for Him. And this lesson may perhaps seem to be the more strongly brought out by what is related of His blessed Mother, and the words which He spoke to her on this remarkable occasion. Before, when our Lord began to manifest Himself in the Temple, her words sound as if she had looked on Him with the eyes *merely* of a mother, forgetting for the moment His High and sacred Person, and only beholding Him as her child, from Whom she could not bear to be parted. Now she speaks as if her faith in Him had become more entire and enlightened; for He had been proclaimed the Lamb of God which should take away the sins of the world; Angels had been promised to ascend and descend upon Him; and God had in the presence of S. John declared Him His Son, and anointed Him with the Holy Ghost and with power. Now she knows for certain that He can do what He will: and as she could not then bear to part with Christ, though it were but for a little time, so now she speaks, as one not well contented with any delay in His fulfilling the high work, for which, as it may seem, she was now prepared to part with Him. At least, this is the account given of the Blessed

Virgin's words, by a very ancient and venerable writer, who might have received the interpretation of them, at second hand only, from S. John himself. "[e] There is nothing," he says, "ill arranged, or out of place," in the proceedings of the Holy Jesus, "as neither is there any incongruity with the Father. For as all things are foreknown by the Father, so they are fulfilled by the Son, in a consistent and orderly manner, and in due time. For which cause when Mary was hurrying on to that admirable miracle of the wine, and wishing before the time to share in that cup, which was to be suddenly prepared; the Lord, repressing her untimely haste, said, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.' This He said, awaiting, as He did, the hour fore-ordained by His Father." By this explanation of the holy saint of old, you see that, as before in the Temple, our Lord was speaking to His Mother as God, and not as Man. It seems as if part of His meaning was, "Do not make too much haste: this is not a matter, of which you can judge: it is Mine own hour, which is to fulfil My great work; Mine own hour, chosen by Myself, and no wishes of yours can quicken it." What further meaning His Blessed Mother might have in her own words, or perceive in His, relating perhaps to former conversations, or former signs, which had passed between them, we can only guess: it should certainly seem, as if she had thought of wine, as intended to be, somehow, instrumental in the work which her Son came to do: and if such were her expectation, we know something of the manner in

[e] S. Ircn. iii. 16. 7.

which God brought it to pass. But, however that were, the Most Holy Jesus saw fit to warn her, that she must not "make haste;" to remind us all, through her, of the great virtue of patience in spiritual things, and the duty of abiding the Lord's leisure.

And now to apply what has been said. If the Blessed Virgin Mary, the highly favoured one, she who had been sanctified to be the Mother of our God and Lord Jesus Christ: if even she had need of being told to leave things to God, and let Him choose His time: surely there is none of us so perfect in faith, but greatly needs the same warning. Few there are in the first place, who, like her, being called by God's word, consent to give up what is dear to them for God's sake, as she was willing to let her Son pursue the work which He came to do, though she knew the prophecy, that a sword should pierce through her own soul also. Few there are of us, who even attempt anything like such self-denial; and among those few, still fewer, who offer their sacrifice with a composed and patient mind. How is it with us, for example, when we pray? when we pray, I mean, in earnest, with a strong desire to obtain what we wish; when a parent prays for a blessing on a child, or a poor man for a maintenance, or a sick man for better health? If the return does not come speedily, is it not too often the case, that the worshipper grows cold and faithless, and begins wondering, whether it be indeed of any use so to serve God? Or suppose a man, in some favourable hour, made aware of the danger he is in, by some wilful sin in which he indulges: the clouds for a moment have parted round him, and he has seen where he really

is, in the middle of an endless world, through which he must move to all eternity, rising or sinking, according to his deeds done in this short space which we call human life. He sees this clearly for once, and it moves him: he is startled to find where he is, and resolves to turn over a new leaf; he begins accordingly and refrains from his sin for a while; so far so good: but take heed of the temptation which follows. It is a sad truth, that, if you have sinned deeply after Baptism, the stain of your sin will still abide upon you, and the thought of it will endeavour to return with a shameful kind of pleasure, even long after you have sincerely tried to repent of it. When such a thing happens, it may be, the Evil one will whisper, "after all, you see, your repentance will avail you nothing, and you may as well let it alone, and please yourself as before." Then do you be warned by the Gospel lesson of Patience: remember, Christ's hour did not come at once, though His own blessed Mother longed for it: and when it did come, it was a most painful one to her. How then can we miserable sinners, breakers of our Baptismal vow, expect to have peace of mind and conscious purity, upon such faint endeavours as we have yet made?

It is true, God does sometimes encourage even great sinners, at the beginning of their repentance, with a strong sense of hope and love towards Him, such as may well help them in their beginnings; but they must not expect such feelings always to last: their sins, in proportion as they have been indulged, will somehow or other mar their comfort, if they do not spoil their piety, in this world: too happy, if

they find themselves, by the Blood of God's dear Son, washed, and redeemed, and saved, at last.

Again, even when, by God's mercy, no great and wasting sin is upon the conscience, yet let men beware of expecting present fruits, immediate returns of prayer. Let them not think much, if they come into this holy house, day after day, and month after month, and yet do not find that entire refreshment of spirit, that sure and certain hope of their own progress and their Lord's favour, which they would fain have; temptations still besetting, and cares annoying them, as much, to their thinking, as in former days and years. Let them not think it much to go on, even with all these discouragements: let them still come here, still bow before God in prayer, still seek the intercession of His Church, still listen to His Scriptures read by His appointed servants; and what if yet they seem to find no particular difference in this world? Are they not servants to Him, Who stretcheth forth His hands "[f]all day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people?" And shall they think much, if need be, as need assuredly there will be, to stretch out *their* hands, all their life long, to a most merciful and gracious Lord?

And what I say of prayer and of God's solemn worship, I say still more of the two blessed Sacraments and their fruits: in respect of *them*, most especially, "he that believeth must not make haste." For they, most of all, belong to the province of faith. The benefits God gives us by the washing of the Bath of Regeneration, or by receiving of our Lord's Body and Blood, are altogether unseen and spiritual.

[f] Rom. x. 21.

For the knowledge of them, the wisest as well as the simplest must be content to wait altogether until God's appointed hour, when he shall depart from this world, and feel and experience what now he only believes. Never then let us breathe a thought against Baptism or the Holy Communion, as though they could hardly be, what the Scriptures and the Church plainly say of them, because we do not *see* or *feel*, that baptized persons or communicants are better than some others who have no part in one or both of those Sacraments. God knoweth who are His, and who are holy: we know not: but one thing we know clearly, and that is, what God has commanded: let us hold fast by that, and He in His hour will graciously do the rest. You wait "[g]for the precious fruit of the earth, and have long patience for it," till you receive the early and later rain: can you not have patience also and stablish your hearts, though the Lord keep you long waiting for the fruit of His Holy Communion, when you have received it, the Seed of immortal life, with due preparation of soul and body?

And as for yourself, so for your friends and kindred, be not too impatient about seeing and feeling their improvement. God may be doing great things in secret for them, may be answering your intercession in the most effectual way, and you, as yet, know nothing of it. Do not hopelessly give up prayer, or any other good thing that you can do for them. For aught you know, the Angel of God's mercy may be even now preparing to interfere in their behalf, and the next intercession of yours may

[g] S. James v. 7.

be just what is wanted, to call him actually down, as the Angel Gabriel came down for the words of Daniel. This is particularly to be marked by persons of tender and affectionate spirits; who are apt to sin, before they are aware of it, in their eager prayers and wishes for their relations and friends here. With regard therefore to all those who are dear to us, and on whose account we are most likely to be tempted to impatience, it will be well when we bring ourselves to recollect, that we cannot love them better than God does: since all the love we bear them flows down from Him. Mothers are kind, because He is so; and they may well trust their children with Him, Who breathed into them all the love they bear to those very children: like good and holy Hannah, that best of mothers, who, because she had prayed so earnestly for her child Samuel, and because she bore so deep an affection towards him, therefore was content to part from him, and lend him to the Lord, to be His as long as he should live.

Thus far I have been speaking of the *temper of mind*, which those who would please our Divine Saviour should endeavour to practise in their prayers and desires both for themselves and their brethren. One *outward token* of that temper will be, a certain composure and calmness in what men do for God's sake; both in their setting about things at first, and in their way of waiting for the result. In this again, "he that believeth will not make haste:" the same Spirit being in him which anointed our Lord and His Church, will make him, like our Lord and His Church, tranquil though resolute: prepared, by God's help, to do what he can, to suffer what God lays on

him, and to wait God's time for the event. Such an one will not be like a child, full of eager expectation, continually looking out every moment for some expected or fancied blessing, as if his looking would make it come the sooner. You know that while time is so spent, men's proper business stands still and remains undone; and so it may be with mere beginners in goodness: but the manly, advanced, confirmed servant of God just does his duty according to the best of his judgement, and without looking anxiously to see what comes of it, goes on to something else. He tries, in his daily obedience, to be like the holy Church in her daily prayers, and other services, regularly presented to her Saviour. Morning by morning, and evening by evening, week by week, and year by year, the Church goes through her appointed round, of homage and sacrifice to her great God and King, without counting carefully, who are the better for it, or how many hours are so spent. It is enough for her, that she is waiting on her God: and well it is for those, who can enter into this spirit of hers, and rejoice in obeying, for mere obedience' sake; though they be not always able to answer the world, when it scoffingly asks, "what good comes of your many prayers and Communions, your Sundays and holidays, your ceremonies and feasts and fasts?" In like manner will the Church's true sons endeavour to obey Christ in all the duties of life; to live in every thing by method and rule; and not be moved by misgivings of their own, or mockeries of others, to say, "What a weariness is it! can it indeed be worth while?"

And what is more, in this calm and tranquil way

of service, they will be following not only the Church, but Christ Himself: Whom we cannot even imagine to have done anything in any kind of haste: Whose very anger was the anger of a just and thoughtful Judge: for we read, He "[a] looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts."

Nor will this sort of calmness, practised religiously under a sense of His fearful presence and the account we have to give, in the least make a man less earnest and diligent in the care of his time and other talents. On the other hand, it will be a great safeguard against the danger we are all in, of doing our duty, though conscientiously, yet partially. You perhaps act eagerly, and throw yourself on some good work very keenly, at the spur of the moment, and it seems to yourself and others, that you have a zeal of God: bye and bye you will very likely find that you have overlooked some caution, some trust, some duty, which ought to have come into your mind, and which another person, less eager in appearance, but at the bottom more conscientious than you, has remembered; and so he has done better than you, neither leaving out what ought to be attended to, nor blemishing his obedience by heedless mixture of somewhat wrong.

In conclusion I would wish you particularly to consider, whether the habit of doing things hastily be not particularly dangerous, as tending to irreverence? irreverence towards God and man. When we are at our prayers, for instance, it is a great thing,

[a] S. Mark iii. 5.

not to grudge our time to Him Whom we then address:—a great thing, and may I not say, a *rare* thing? I fear I might say so with truth: I fear it would be no mistake to say that a great many spoil their devotions by haste and hurry, not so much through their quantity of business, as through a habit they have got, of doing all their duties with haste and inattention, except they be such, as bring their reward with them. They pray amiss, because prayer is a matter of faith, and they, even in their religious duties, live rather by sight and experience, than by faith. But hasty, inattentive prayer, prayer wilfully such, what is it but irreverence? And what can it breed but irreverence, generally, in the conduct of those who indulge it? irreverence I say, to man as well as God; for the same persons will deal hastily, and though they mean it not, unkindly, with their brethren, when they are not particularly interested in them. They will not listen, will not take pains, will not go out of their way, will wilfully forget: and what can the end be, but great loss of charity?

However, the remedy for all this, God be thanked, is not doubtful; neither is it beyond the reach of those who will use the grace offered them by Christ in His Church. It is this: to fix in our very hearts, and have continually before our eyes, the world after death as a *real thing*, an *eternal* thing, a thing prepared for ourselves: a thing too, of which we cannot judge, nor attain to it, by any wisdom of our own; but only by such lights as the Lord has provided for us in His Church. If we can once *practise*, not merely *profess* and *endeavour*, this only true way of

thinking, we shall then be too glad to obey at once, without asking questions, or requiring visible fruits. And thus childlike, following the strong and gentle hand which is ever held out to guide us through the world, we shall fall asleep, and wake (so be it!) in Paradise; for His sake, Who died for us, with Whom we shall then be, and Who will then make all things plain.

SERMON XLII.

THE BEGINNING OF MIRACLES.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

S. JOHN ii. 10.

"*Thou hast kept the good wine until now.*"

EPIPHANY means "manifestation;" the manifestation of God on earth: the eternal Son shewing Himself in sundry ways when He had taken our nature upon Him, and had been made true Man as we are, of the substance of the Virgin Mary His Mother. To outward appearance, He generally seemed as any other man; but every now and then tokens of Godhead broke out through the veil of His Flesh, as flashes of lightning from a dark cloud; and these were so many Epiphanies, so many manifestations of His true self. The day, which we call the Feast of the Epiphany, is remarkable for three of these manifestations, three of the most glorious and blessed, and most exactly set down in Scripture. On that day, our Lord being a Child in His Virgin Mother's arms, was visited and worshipped at Bethlehem by the Wise men from the East. On that day, being thirty years old, He was baptized by S. John in the river Jordan, when the heavens were opened, the Holy Ghost descended, and the Voice of the Father proclaimed Him the beloved Son. On that day again (so Church tradition seems to say) He began His wonderful miracles

by turning water into wine. This being one of the most remarkable Epiphanies, or manifestations of God Incarnate, is appointed to be read as the Gospel for to-day, as His visit to the Temple at twelve years' old was last Sunday, and as some of His most remarkable miracles will be for the two next Sundays. They are all so many manifestations of our Lord, and are therefore suited to this time.

The miracle of Cana was remarkable, in the first place, because it was the beginning of miracles. Then the veil began to be drawn up, which had hitherto concealed the power of the Holy Jesus over this visible world. He made that world in the beginning: He was in it always, upholding it by the word of His power: but as yet it knew Him not. As a holy Bishop and Father of the Church observes[a], "When our Lord turned the water into wine, He was but doing the very same thing which He does every year in every grape of every vintage: the waters from above nourish the vine-tree, and are taken up into the fruit, and turned by His secret power into that juice of the grape, which becomes to us wine." But because this goes on regularly every year, we look for it of course, and do not call it a miracle; yet it is quite as much beyond our power, and quite as much Christ's doing, as when He bade the servants at Cana draw out the water which they had poured into the vessels, and behold He had silently changed

[a] The comparison of God's works in nature and in revelation is frequent among the Fathers, and that in regard to the miracle of Cana. S. Aug. de Trin. iii. 5. has been pointed out to me. S. Augustine himself is quoted above p. 409. Familiar as this quotation was to us formerly, I cannot verify it. Ed.

it into wine. The wonder, the Almightiness, is the same in both cases: the difference is, that at Cana and on like occasions the veil which hides His outstretched Arm was for a season drawn up, and men were permitted to see Him, as it were at work. For a little moment, and in respect of that particular action, their eyes were opened, and they might discern a little of what the Angels always see, the Creator of the world ordering and moving His creatures. It is a good thing to bear this in mind, when we read of our Lord's mighty works. We are apt to imagine that they belong to a state of things quite different from what we live in ourselves: but the difference is not in the state of things, but in us. We live in the midst of the same power, the same Presence; It is equally near to us: but we have not, the Church in general has not, the same faith to behold it. He cannot do visible miracles among us, because of our unbelief. When we have the same constant universal self-denying faith that those first Christians had, then may we hope that the like signs will follow our faith, which were promised to theirs. Let us learn of our Lord's miracles, especially of this one in Cana, to see His hand in the daily course of our lives, in the turns of our fortune, in the growth of our crops, in our joy and sorrow, in our health and sickness. Let us say continually to ourselves, It is Christ, Who died for me, Who sends me these blessings; Christ, Who died for me, and rose again, and Who is even now at the Right Hand of God, He lays on me this chastening for my good: my meat, drink and sleep, the comforts and conveniences of my life, my friends and relations, are all His immediate

gift: He is near me at every moment: let me go on but a little while in faith, and the veil will be drawn up: "[b] He will destroy in this mountain," in His Church, "the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations:" we shall see Him as He Is, ordering all things, and we shall see all things as they are, ordered by Him.

All our Lord's miracles are, in this way, short glimpses of a power and mercy which is going on among us, just the same whether we perceive it or no. But the turning the water into wine shews itself to be of this kind more than many of the others, because it is not so much a miracle of mercy, as most of them. No great affliction or very pressing need called for it. The guests wanted wine; but it does not seem that, if they had gone without, any thing worse would have happened to them than that little disappointment. Whereas most of the miracles, that came after, were for healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, casting out evil spirits, or in some way or other removing great affliction. There is no such call in this case. Christ's work here is in appearance a mere manifestation of power, as when strong persons do something wonderful merely to make a shew of their strength, not because it does any great good at the time. We may be sure then that there is some deep mystery in it. God's works are never intended simply to set us on wondering, but to teach us worthy thoughts and dutiful ways. So this work of turning water into wine teaches in the first place to remember Christ's presence and power in all that we call the works of nature: and in the next place

[b] Isa. xxv. 7.

we may be certain that it was a kind of parable with a deep meaning, acted before people's eyes, as other parables are told, like histories in their ears. Let us consider a few of its circumstances.

It took place at a wedding feast: and we know what is commonly likened to a wedding feast in Holy Scripture. Our own Prayer Book tells us. It is the mystical, the heavenly and sacramental union between Christ and His Church. By virtue of this blessed union, and the better to fulfil its divine purposes, a complete change has been made of all things; there is "[c] a new heaven and a new earth:" "[d] the old things are passed away, behold all things are become new:" the gold which had become dross is changed back again into fine gold: the garden of Eden, which had become a wilderness, is renewed and becomes Paradise again. By these and other like parables the Holy Scripture represents to us the great gift of our Almighty Saviour, His uniting us to Himself by taking our nature upon Him, and by making us, each in our turn, in Regeneration, members of Himself. This is sometimes compared in the Prophets to the changing of water into wine: and this, no doubt, is what our Divine Master would give men a token of, when He changed water into wine at this marriage in Cana.

Observe, He did it not, until towards the end of the feast; for the governor of the feast, having tasted the water that was made wine, was surprised at the goodness of it, on this very account, because it was the end of the feast, whereas, he says, it was the custom generally to set forth the best wine first.

[c] Rev. xxi. 1. [d] Ib. 4, 5.

Why did our Lord wait till the end of the feast? Most likely it was to represent to us His waiting till the last Time before He entered on His great work of salvation, and began to make all things new. He waited till the world was grown old, and the latest age of it was come: and then in the fulness of time He came forth from the Father, "[e] made of a woman, made under the law," "that we might receive the adoption of sons." This is what seems to be represented by His keeping the good wine until now. God does not humour our impatience. He keeps His best till last, by a certain rule, to which all who would be happy must submit. He will have us bear chastening, imperfection, doubt, distress, here, that we may, by His mercy, come at last to be "[f] satisfied with the plenteousness of His house, and to drink of His pleasures, as out of the river." Thus our Lord's waiting with His good wine till the end of the feast may encourage us in patient expectation, and charitable bearing with what cannot be helped.

Again, the water which was made wine was put there for the purifying of the Jews: that is, that the guests might have abundance to wash themselves when they sat down. "[g] For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders." The water then was for the purifying of the Jews, and our Lord turned it into wine. What are we to learn from this circumstance? Surely that the Jewish law and ceremonies, the saints and commandments and histories of the Old Testament, were now to be made

[e] Gal. iv. 4, 5. [f] Ps. xxxvi. 8.

[g] S. Mark vii. 3.

known to men in their full and high meaning. "[h]The darkness is past and the true Light now shineth." That which was glorious in Moses, hath no glory now, in comparison of the glory which excelleth. The Passover is turned into the Holy Communion, circumcision into Baptism, the brazen serpent into the Cross, the cleansing of the leper into the Absolution or remission of sins, Moses and the Prophets into Christ and His Apostles, the glory of the Lord over the Mercy-seat into the inward Presence of God the Holy Ghost. Thus is the water, the poor mean element of this earth, and of the law, turned by the touch and word of Christ into "[i] wine that maketh glad the heart of man."

Again, our Lord did this mighty work, upon mention being made to Him of the want by His blessed Mother. She said unto Him, "They have no wine," and we know not how much of men's good may depend on the prayers of good and holy Christians.

Again, Christ seems at this feast to take leave in a manner of His Mother, to prepare her to be separated from Him: as at the last feast of His Life, the Holy Supper, He takes leave of His disciples. He was now going to be without any regular home, not to have where to lay His head, to be far from her, who had hitherto so earnestly watched Him: therefore He says, "What is there between Me and thee? Mine hour is not come;" meaning, perhaps, "For a time we must part, to meet together again, and never part more: that will be, when Mine hour of suffering is passed: but for the present we have nothing to do with each other." May we not hereby understand, first, more and more of our most Holy Saviour's

[h] 1 S. John ii. 8. [i] Ps. civ. 15.

unspeakable love for us, in that He spared not His Mother's grief when He was to give Himself for us? And next, may we not learn this lesson, that Christ's work on earth cannot be done, nor the purpose of His coming answered, except some at least of those who believe on Him will make up their minds to give up all for His sake: to hate father and mother and brothers and sisters, "[k] yea and his own life also," in order to take up their cross? Did I say, *some* must do this? nay, all of us must do it, in our measure and proportion: we must all make sacrifices, use self-denial, give up our own will, as God shall call and enable us: else how can we be like Christ, Who gave up all? and if we be not like Him, how can we help to do His work? We must say to our dearest friend on earth, What have I to do with thee? We must part with them for a time, we must deny ourselves much, very much, of the joy which we may have promised ourselves in them, that we may the better tread in our Lord's steps, and more powerfully promote His Kingdom. So doing, we shall by God's mercy make both ourselves and our friends more sure to meet again in the heavenly kingdom, when our hour shall be full come.

By this time perhaps we may discern some part of the reason why this particular miracle, the turning water into wine at a marriage feast, came first among our Lord's mighty works: why it was, as S. John calls it, the beginning of miracles. It was so, because it was in an especial way a sample, a taste, a glimpse, of that power which is at the bottom of all miracles: the power which keeps up the ordinary course of the world, and works such astonishing

[k] S. Luke xiv. 26.

changes in it. The turning water into wine was, as I said, a sample of this power, exercised as it is every year in the growth of the vine: and next, it was especially fitted to be the first miracle, because it was a type and figure of the great work, on which our Lord was now publicly to enter, the renewing of lost mankind: and it was so ordered in all its circumstances, as to give us all much instruction, how we should work under Christ, and follow His steps in that great work.

When we think of this marriage feast in Cana, let it put us in mind that Jesus Christ is in our feasts, is with us wherever we are, and in all that we do, turning our water into wine, our earth into heaven, if we prevent Him not by our sins. "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it:" those were the words which His Mother spake unto the servants, and if they had not obeyed her voice, it does not seem as if the miracle would have been wrought. Never let us forget that our Christian privileges and blessings depend on the same condition. It depends on our sincerely trying to do whatever Christ hath said unto us, whether our blessings shall be blessings indeed, or that happen which sounds so fearful in the Prophet; "[1] I will curse your blessings: yea I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart." Alas, how sad it is to think how many of God's best gifts to men are daily and hourly thrown away by our sins, and falling under this fearful sentence: how many marriages, how many feasts, nay how many solemn meetings and aweful Sacraments are turned from tokens of God's favour into judgements and occasions of falling, because Christ's ser-

[1] Mal. ii. 2.

vants will not even purpose and try to do whatever He saith unto them, and so make them blessings indeed!

And even when we have some such purpose, yet let us not reckon too positively upon the full sense of a present blessing at all times. The way of the Gospel is to keep the good wine until the last. The clearest and most precious foretastes of God's favour and eternal joy come rather after long waiting, sore trial, patient endurance of pain, care, and ill usage, than when we first seem to need them. In regard of these spiritual comforts, as of the other fruits of our Christian labour, "[m] let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Again, if we would be perfect followers of Christ, we must be content to part with our friends now, as He at this feast with His blessed Mother, that we may meet them bye and bye with a holier welcome, when our and their hour is come; and that so we may keep them for ever.

Finally, since we are all used, I hope, to begin and end our principal meals with a solemn offering of thanks to Almighty God, what if we try to do so hereafter with less hurry and more decency than most of us, I fear, are apt to do? What if we recollect this feast at Cana as a token that Christ is even now present, ready to bless and break our meat for us, and turn our water into the wine of Angels, if we will not hinder His blessing! Christ is present in our daily refreshments, and in our more solemn feasts; let us try to do whatever He saith unto us; let our meals be pure, innocent, and thankful, and then fear not but they will be glad and joyful enough, true tokens of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

[m] Gal. vi. 9.

SERMON XLIII.

TREASURE IN HEAVEN.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

S. MATT. vi. 20.

"Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven."

I TRIED to explain to you last Sunday, that the Church in the four first sentences of the Offertory, which are said, as you know, before Holy Communion, tries to guard us against four things, which are the chief enemies to worthy and devout Communion: the first of those things being pride and self-satisfied ways, when persons seek credit to themselves for their good works instead of giving back all the glory of them to God. This our Lord warns us against by the first of those four sentences: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." And the Church before the Communion, takes up the warning: as much as to say, "When you come to serve God with your best, take very great care that you neither praise yourself for it, nor wish others to praise you. You must come and communicate openly so that men shall see you; but you must not do it in order that they may see you. If that is what you have most at heart, you have no reward of your Father which is in Heaven.

Thus our Saviour and His Church exhort and warn us against all worldly pride: and in the next sentence they warn us no less plainly against all worldly covetousness. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Our Lord knew well what a hold earthly treasure has on men's minds: how apt they are to think of it night and day: how it interferes with their prayers, and alms, and all manner of good and holy works: and so He puts His mark upon it in the Sermon on the Mount: exhorting us in many words, not even to care about our meat, drink, and clothing: but to leave all to our Father in Heaven, as the birds of the air do, and the lilies of the field. And He gives us to understand, that, except we try to do this, our prayers and our alms will come back to us without a blessing, because they will not be true prayers and true alms: God will not own them, proceeding as they will from a selfish and unbelieving heart. And the Church would have us understand the like as concerning the Holy Communion. We are to offer up ourselves there to God, "ourselves, our souls and bodies," we are to give them up to God; all that we are, and all that we have is to be turned into a holy sacrifice to Him; but this cannot be if we keep back anything; if we permit any store, any treasure, any earthly thing, to be so dear to us, that we feel as if we could not in any wise part from it. Such a mind as that is keeping back, one thing at least, from God, at the

moment when we profess to give Him all: and how then can we expect the great Sacramental gift? If we will not be all His, how dare we reckon upon having Him all ours?

Thus you may plainly understand, why our holy mother the Church, being to prepare us for Holy Communion, adds this second warning about treasure to the first about our light shining before men. Let us consider it well, my brethren; for depend upon it, we have all need enough of it. There is not one of us, but is tempted to prefer something or other in this world to what He offers us in Heaven. If we do not all care so much for money, yet we do care for something else, which will come to an end, when we die.

Now see how mercifully our Lord speaks on the matter. He does not say, Have no treasure, care not at all about laying up. Rather it is as if He said, "You must have treasure, I know: you must have something to set your hearts upon: all I seek of you is only, that you may have treasure that will not perish but will abide your own for ever. I only bid you seek the true riches instead of the false." Surely we can all understand this. It is as if a person were fond of gay and costly apparel, and some good friend were to say, "Do not leave this fine robe down here in the dirt and dust, uncovered and exposed to all manner of insects, and within reach of any one who has a fancy to steal it, but put it away where it will be safe; lay it in a clean and dry place, and lock the door upon it, that it may be neither stolen nor spoiled." Or again, it is as if a man had a stock of gold and silver plate, adorned perhaps with precious jewels, and some one were to say to

him, "Do take care of this treasure: it is far too precious to be spoiled: why should you leave it in the damp to be tarnished, when you might with no great trouble store it away and keep it as good as new? Why should you set it in an open room, without fastening, bolt or bar, when you know there are hundreds of thieves about, and that they are all well aware of your having such precious things, and have set their hearts on stealing them from you if they can? Why should you do this, when, all the while, you know for certain of a place, where you may lay up your treasure without any doubt or fear, and come again millions of times and find all safe, no stain, no tarnish upon it? Surely if you care in earnest for your treasure, you cannot be at a loss what to do."

Thus kind and condescending, cometh to all of us the Voice of our heavenly Master and Adviser: telling us not to care for gay clothing, for these garments will very soon be moth-eaten: nor yet for gold and silver, for it will rust and decay. What is become even now of the fine apparel, which made us so happy, perhaps, a year or two ago? It is spoiled and worn out; the moths and worms have got it, long before this time. What is become of your gold and silver? Even if you have it now in safe keeping, you cannot depend on it, for any time to come. You may drop down dead in an instant: will your gold and silver bring you to life again? You may be smitten with some incurable disease: will your gold and silver help to heal you? Or violent enemies, tyrants and robbers, may come upon you, and find these hoards of yours, and rifle them in a moment. You may have counted

it all over in the evening, and locked it up safe at night, and yet it may be gone in the morning.

So it is here; but so it will not be in Heaven. Those who shall be so happy as to be admitted into that blessed place, through the merits of our only Saviour, will be clothed with immortal bodies, which shall never fade nor wear away; bodies fashioned like the glorious Body of our gracious Saviour Himself: and both souls and bodies will be clothed with the robe of heavenly righteousness, which He first put on them at Baptism, only made bright and clean for ever, and entirely purged by true repentance from all the spots of wilful sin, which the world the flesh and the devil have since brought upon them. Neither torment nor disease nor decay shall ever be able to touch them any more: no stain of evil deed, desire or fancy, shall ever profane those heavenly garments.

Again; as long as we are in this world, the bad spirits, we know, are around us: we are like the traveller in our Lord's parable, on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, ever falling among thieves. Along the whole way, from the Font to the grave, the devil and his angels are lying in wait for us: as it is written in the Psalm; "[a] He sitteth lurking in the thievish corners of the streets, and privily in his lurking dens doth he ravish the innocent; his eyes are set against the poor. He lieth waiting secretly; even as a lion, lurketh he in his den, that he may ravish" (that is, plunder and rob) "the poor." Every good grace and help, which the mercy of our gracious God allows us, he, the Evil one, looks on with evil eye, and presently sets himself to con-

[a] Ps. x. 8, 9.

trive ways of taking it from us. If he see a young person resolved, by God's help, to keep himself chaste, and pure, immediately he begins to consider how he may throw temptation in that young man's way. If his foot unhappily slip, if in some fatal moment he consent to grievous sin, how greatly then does the devil rejoice against him! and how earnestly, how continually will he endeavour to hinder his rising up again! Here he is the Thief, breaking through, and stealing the treasure of Baptismal purity: but into Heaven he cannot come: no place for him is found there any more: the treasure of good and Christian works, which is there laid up, is safe from him for ever; he cannot touch it, he cannot hurt it, he cannot waste it, he cannot defile it with sin. There will be no bad example there, to lead the well-meaning and simple astray: no sad feeling of inward imperfection, hanging about men in what they do for God: their good works will be good works indeed; their holy thoughts will be altogether holy; their love for their God and Saviour will take up their whole heart, and will burn on brighter and brighter, more and more glowing, through all Eternity. All this our Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Owner of heaven and earth, has promised to His obedient servants, in saying, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal."

Consider all the things on earth which men are used to call treasures, and see whether the only true way to enjoy them is not the laying them up for treasures in Heaven. Not seldom we hear affectionate warm-hearted people, how they call their wives and

children, their brethren or sisters, their kinsmen and near friends, Treasures. And indeed what can be half so precious, among the things which our merciful God has given us here richly to enjoy, as the love of good and kind hearts, made especially near to us by Divine Providence? But then what a sad thought, that it can only last a few years, that it must all come to an end, when we die! that the child, which here is the mother's best treasure, the very darling of her heart, will after a very short time be nothing to her, or worse than nothing! And yet this must surely happen. Fathers and mothers will very soon lose all their joy in their children, and if they remember them at all, will do so only to their shame and remorse, unless they are careful to bring them up in the fear of God. That is the only way to give them a chance of a happy meeting at the last Great Day. Oh! my friends, you who are parents, think of this in good time. It will very soon be too late. Do you love your children? I know you do. I know you all love them after a fashion; you cannot well bear the thought of their being hurt: you would not for a great deal lose them. How will it be with you, if, by your bad example, you should see them one day in everlasting fire? If you feel as if it would break your hearts to be without them for the few days of this life, how will you be able, in the other life, to be evermore parted from them? As I said just now, you call them sometimes your Treasure: Will you not do anything to keep your treasure? Will you neglect it, so that the thief may carry it away, and it may never come to heaven at all? or will you neglect your own souls,

and throw away God's grace, so that even if your children, your treasure, should come to heaven, they will be no longer any treasure to you? God Almighty has given you these little ones, and has put this love for them into your hearts, that you and they, making use of His grace, might go on loving each other for ever. Then even though His will may be to send death into your houses, and to separate you, outwardly and visibly, from these your treasures, taking one or more of them to Himself; still they will be your treasures out of sight, but for that very reason laid up all the more safely in Heaven. But wicked parents, and such as allow their children to be wicked, when they part from them, part with them eternally.

Sometimes men call their good name their treasure, and say that if they lose that, they are ruined. And what do they mean by their good name? They mean the good opinion and favourable talk of a few mortals for a few years: they account it a good and precious thing, when men, like themselves, speak well of them. And it is good and precious, if a right use be made of it. Else it is one of the worst snares of the devil. And what is a right use of this precious talent, a good name? When, being praised, a man in his heart tries to give back all the glory to God: when the good opinion of man sets him upon thinking how it will be at the Great Day, or what the Angels are now thinking of him: or what this very world, these friends whose praise is so tempting, would think and say of him, could they know his secret sins. This is making a right use of a good name, and laying it up for a treasure in the world of

truth. If you so sacrifice to our Lord all the praise you receive here, you will by His great mercy find it again in that Day. The Angels will stand rejoicing round, while He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and you, overwhelmed with such mercy, will say, 'When did I any thing for Thee?' "[b]Not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

And as it is in respect of our children, and our good names, so in respect of all other things which take up our hearts, and are a kind of treasure to us here. Some men feel a particular pleasure in learning, and making out hard questions: some, in working skilfully at their several employments; such as farming, gardening, building, or the like; some in looking on the flowers, the stars, and all the glorious works of God: some in sweet singing, verses, and music. Now of these last in particular Holy Scripture speaks many times, as if their earthly delights (supposing them good Christians) were but a preparation for the glory and delight of Heaven. If they sing like Christians here, from their very hearts, their employment there will be to sing the new song before the Throne, with Angels and Saints, in God's immediate Presence. And we may well believe, that not these only, but all other innocent and good employments on earth, being followed in His stedfast fear and love, will in some way be turned by Him into heavenly treasure for us. Our very sports and diversions and meals, if we be careful to hallow them by prayer and strict obedience, will not altogether pass away like a dream, but will add some little, more or less, to our blessedness: although to

[b] 1 Cor. xv. 10.

speak the very truth, nothing is little, which makes any difference in Eternity.

Surely then, my beloved brethren, there is but one thing for us to do. Here is our Lord Jesus Christ on the Mount. He is set, and His disciples are come unto Him: and we among the rest, and He hath opened His mouth and taught us saying, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." What can we do but take our Saviour at His word: and give Him up our earthly treasures, that He may give them back to us, turned into heavenly? He does not bid us at once part with all. Sometimes He does so call on men, and if they have the heart to obey His call, it is well: but we here, we may well apprehend that we are not as yet worthy of so high a command. Thus much, however, He does expect of us, that, in heart and will, we should sacrifice all: solemnly giving ourselves up to our Redeemer, every morning of our lives, to serve Him that day with every one of His good gifts; money, good name, strength, health, learning, skill, friends and kinsmen, wives and children, and especially with the spiritual helps and means of grace, which He has bestowed upon us. Every day in the morning offer all to Him, and in the evening try and judge yourself, whether you have kept back anything. This is the way to get rid of the worldly mind: this will keep you, by His grace, ready for the Holy Communion, and fit to die: this will make each one of your days here on earth in its measure like the great Day of Heaven: where each happy soul has the full blessing of his own treasure, because he is continually offering it all to God.

SERMON XLIV.

THE BEST, LAST.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

S. JOHN ii. 10.

"Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

WE are all children, my brethren, if the truth must be told: we are children as long as we live; and, as children cannot be safe except by following guidance, so neither can we [a].

The blessed Apostle speaks of this [b]. We are now, the wisest of us, a sort of children, speaking as children, understanding as children. But all this is in order to a time, when we shall be full grown and perfect. We shall become men, and "put away childish things." But for the present we are very childish; and one mark of our childishness is, that we are naturally in such a hurry to get whatsoever we really long and wish for. Look at a baby in his mother's or nurse's arms: shew him any thing he likes, and see how he will cry for it, if he do not get it directly. He wants to have all at once. He cannot bear to be kept waiting. And elder Christians, yea, and we, grown men and women, are commonly too like these little simple ones. We set our hearts upon this

[a] Sentence left unfinished in MS., "so we, &c."

[b] 1 Cor. xiii. 11, 12.

object or upon that, and account it a strange and hard thing, if our soul's desire be not granted us immediately. And so men become impatient and restless, and very often lose all, because they will not quietly and contentedly stay the set time, which the Lord hath appointed. Many a murder, many an adultery has been committed before now, through the restless covetousness of the sinful heart urging persons on to it. They wanted to be rich before the time, and so were moved to take away the lives of those who kept them out of their money. Or they desired the company of such and such an one, and would not wait until God's Providence, bringing them together in holy matrimony, had made it lawful for them to have her. But let alone these gross and grievous sins; consider, each one, the course of his own life. Do you not see, do you not feel, how hard it is not to set your hearts upon present things, things of this world, for this very reason, that they are present? how hard to keep back your good wine, your very best, until the end of the feast, that is, Eternity? Yet Holy Scripture teaches that this is what we Christians must do.

We heard it just now. It is one of the great Epiphany lessons. Epiphany you know is "manifestation;" and the Sundays in Epiphany, are so many manifestations of Jesus Christ, the Word made Flesh, God made manifest in the Flesh. Thus, last Sunday, He manifested Himself to His parents in the Temple, being, in the Flesh, but twelve years old. He told them, that He "must be about His Father's business," the great work, for which He came into the world. Everything is to give way to that: the love of

God is to come first, even before the love of parents. This Sunday again, He manifests Himself to His disciples by that first miracle at Cana in Galilee. And this time it is at a marriage. He turns water into wine, to signify to His Church and to the world, the great and unspeakable change, which He had come to work in this lower world: as He saith Himself, "[c]I make all things new:" "[d]a new Heaven, and a new Earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away:" it is "[e]a new creation: old things are passed away." And the miracle, the change of the water into wine, takes place, not until the end of the Feast, that all may see and know God's purpose, of summing up and finishing all things in Jesus Christ: making Him "[f]the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth:" in Him, *sealing up* the vision and prophecy. So that without Him there can be no perfection. Nothing, until He come, can be as God would have it to be: and now He is come, there can be no going back. You cannot be as if you had never heard of Him, never been made members of Him. In Him or nowhere at all, you must find your happiness: in Him, that is in the sight of Him; in seeing Him Face to face. And since this can only be in Heaven, you must be content to wait for your perfect happiness until you are in heaven. That good wine, that wine which truly and alone "maketh glad the heart of man;" that river of pleasures, wherewith He satisfieth them that know Him and are true of heart: *that* well of life is only with the Father and the Son in Heaven. If you are so happy as to win your way thither by the exceed-

[c] Rev. xxi. 5. [d] Ib. 1. [e] 2 Cor. v. 17. [f] Rom. x. 4.

ing grace of our God, then you will see Him, then you will drink of that fountain, drink abundantly, drink and forget all besides: but until then you must wait; you must look upwards, it may be, with failing eyes; you must bear your burden, and cry out again and again, "O Lord, how long?"

But you do not like this; you cannot understand how having once been called, having once sat down at God's Feast, you should not at once be made partakers of the very best. God, you have been truly taught, is no hard Master. He "[g] giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not:" He openeth His hand, and filleth all things with good[h]. And what is this which I am told, that He keeps His best gifts from me, for I know not how long, and bids me take up my cross, and deny myself, and walk painfully along the narrow way, in expectation of delights whereof as yet I see and know nothing? Had I not better listen to those tempting and musical voices, which I hear on the other side of me, calling me to pleasures and delights and entertainments, which I can entirely feel and understand to be such; which are not in the clouds, and at a distance, but close at hand; pleasures and delights, which I seem as if I could make sure of by just reaching out my hand and taking them? Had I not best improve my chance of them, before our short life is over, and let the future be as it may? Who does not know, what it is to have such a voice as this, whispering in his secret heart, and too welcome to his corrupt flesh? Who has not heard the same voice, sounding aloud in this evil world? For indeed the ruler of the feast

[g] S. James i. 5. [h] Ps. civ. 28.

in the Gospel spake of most of us but too truly, when he said, "*Every* man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse." As if one should say, By far the greater portion of Adam's children, having their choice given, "In which will you try to be happy? Time or Eternity? for to both you cannot devote yourselves," the more part, I say, choose this present time, leaving Eternity to take care of itself. They enjoy themselves a little, while they live, but "[i] the end of that mirth" is bitterness: their best, (so they will have it) comes first, and all that comes after must be worse and worse for ever. The prodigal, with his riotous living and his harlots, except God work a miracle of grace upon him, what can he end in, but the swine and their husks? Who can say that his choice was not evil? Yet who can deny that it was most agreeable to nature?

Take you care then, my brethren, each one of you: learn from that Master of the Feast, "[k] what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God," concerning your eternal salvation. You know it has always been His way to try His people's faith by keeping back something of the good which He intended for them, until a certain time before ordained; the very time which He knew to be fittest. His rule with mankind, so far as we know, has ever been a rule of *Progress;* you will notice the word perhaps, some of you; for it is a word very much in the mouths of men now-a-days; the papers you read are very full of it. *Progress*, they tell you, is the thing, and the men of *Progress* are the men to be admired,

[i] Prov. xiv. 13. [k] Rom. xii. 2.

and followed. And they would speak quite truly, my brethren, if only they meant the true kind of *Progress;* the increasing, not in evil but in good; the drawing nearer, not to Hell but to Heaven. For in this way, as I was saying, the great God Himself has ever condescended to deal with us. No doubt He might at once have created this heaven and earth which we see, in its full and entire perfection. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the whole might have burst, if one may so speak, into being, in the perfection of being. But such was not His will. He worked His work of creation by degrees, by steps and parts, for six days, one day after another; each day's work adding beauty and perfection to the whole: until at length on the last working-day, He crowned His marvellous work with man, made in His own Image, after His likeness. His last work of creation in this world was His best, so that the Angels, looking on, might in a manner say, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

Next in making man happy, He was minded to observe the same rule of Progress and gradual improvement. He placed him in Paradise; He made all trees to grow for him. He gave him knowledge of the dumb creatures and dominion over them; He created him a helpmate in a wonderful manner; He put him on his trial in Paradise, designing for him, no doubt, had he gone through it well, a very great reward; most likely a high place in Heaven.

And, as it was with creation, so also with Redemption. It was not, and is not wrought out, either for the whole world, or for each child of Adam in particular, all at once, all in a moment; as the Conception, for

example, or the Nativity, or the Death of our Lord. Those were wrought, each in its own moment, as the birth or death of any one of us. But the whole work, of which they were parts, all depending on *them*, more or less, went on, is going on, step by step; and still each fresh instance adds glory and grace to the whole, that had gone before. Four thousand whole years He tarried, before He would send His Son to be our Christ, and by two separate, and several, courses and dealings with His people did He prepare His way before Him. First, by the Patriarchs from Adam to Moses; second, by the Law, and the Prophets also. And all that was but preparation. The great work did not really begin, until the moment of the holy Incarnation. With that began a third and last dispensation; not preparing for any to come after it, but itself completing all that had gone before. The good wine, that had been kept until then, was poured abundantly over the earth. The fountains of the great deep of God's mercies were broken up, not to drown but to save mankind. There could be no other Saviour; no other Comforter; no other Baptism; no other Body of Christ; no new Creed to be found out in later days by wiser readers of the Bible, to set the Apostles right and improve upon their work. No, dear brethren, if any man come teaching you at any time a new Gospel which the Apostles never taught, be sure that man is either deceiving you, or sadly deceived himself, or both. The Gospel, that is the meaning of the Creeds, was given us, once for all, on the day of Pentecost. The Sacrifice for sin was complete, once for all, on the Day of our Lord's Passion. Yet still the work of Christ continued, and

still continues; gradual, not ended, but in course of accomplishment; in that the salvation of each one of us, by the use and improvement of these blessed gifts, is a thing still to be accomplished; it has not yet taken place. All these wonders, my brethren, these miracles of power and mercy, have been wrought for each one of you: for each one of you, separately and distinctly known to God, and cared for by Him, before the foundation of the world. You who have come into this Church to-day, as you have come hundreds of times before, with no serious thought, no dutiful remembrance, or loving worship of your Saviour: I tell you, that for you He came down; for you, He humbled Himself even to the Death of the Cross; as truly as He "was made Man" and died, for S. Peter or for His own Mother, or for any other the greatest of saints. And why has He so cared, why does He still so care for you? Because He loves your soul, my friend, that precious immortal soul of yours, with which you are so sadly trifling: because He is keeping for you, if you will but come longing after it, "the good Wine," His cup, the cup of salvation. Alas! that you should turn from it, for your earthly drink, your carnal pleasures, for anything or all things in this present evil world! But however, turn which way you will, this is what your Lord has provided for you, at so dear a price to Himself: and He wills you to be all your life here in training for it. It is the best; it is all good in one, for it is His own Self, as seen and tasted in heaven. Of course then, it must come last: you cannot yet taste its fulness, because you are not yet in heaven. But what of that? He is drawing you towards it; look back

and see, how many steps His providence has even now already caused thee to take in that direction. You have been baptized, brought to Church, instructed in the Bible and Prayer book, taught to pray, confirmed most likely; perhaps you have added to all this, Holy Communion: besides thousands of helps, gifts, providences, more than you can remember, or I imagine: but sure I am that you may recollect enough, if you will, to be quite sure that all this time you have been at our Lord's Feast, at the marriage of God with man, in the Person of Christ Jesus; that marriage where He and His mother Mary are evermore present; with them, and with all His saints you have been all this time His guests, and He has been feeding you with the very best of His blessings here on earth. But every moment, the end of the earthly feast, which is also the earthly trial, is approaching, and our Lord gives you to understand, that, when the end comes, it will be the best wine indeed. Even His consolations in the Church on earth will be as nothing compared with the joy that shall overflow and drown the elect in that moment. Our fathers, the holy men of the Old Testament, walked in a shadow, a blessed and refreshing shadow, but still only a shadow of "those good things to come." We have the very Image of the things, such an Image as carries the Truth with it, although the Truth itself be out of sight. By and by the veil will be withdrawn, the cloud rolled away, and we shall see Him as He Is. Then, what joy to unite with all the saints in acknowledging, "Thou hast indeed kept the good wine until now!" How little, how trifling will then seem to us the things which have troubled us, while we were here! And

also the things which have been our joy and consolation! My brethren, mark what I say. For if you do not mark it now, a time will come, when you will remember it to your shame and anguish. If you will insist on having your good things here, you must make up your mind to meet with evil things there. But if you can content yourself to let God choose for you in this world, and try with all your might to choose Him for your portion in the other, then it will go well with you in both worlds. For this is His own sure word, "[1] Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

SERMON XLV.

MYSTERIES OF FAITH, AMID FEW AIDS, AND OF FAITHLESSNESS AMID ALL AIDS TO FAITH.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

S. MATT. viii. 10.

"*When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*"

THERE are but two places in the whole Gospel, in which our Lord is said to have wondered; this and the place of S. Mark [a], where we read that He marvelled because of the unbelief of His own countrymen at Nazareth. Both times it was at men's believing or not believing in Him. The centurion in S. Matthew believed, when everything seemed against his believing, if we were to judge as men judge; every thing almost to prevent his attention being drawn to our Blessed Lord. The Nazarenes in S. Mark were unbelieving and stubborn, nay and endeavoured actually to destroy our Saviour, though they, of all mankind, seemed to have the fairest chance of coming early to a true knowledge of Him. The centurion in his humility would not venture near our Lord, yet in his faith resorted to no other but Him: and again he shrank from the thought of one so unworthy receiving our Saviour under his roof, yet doubted

[a] S. Mark vi. 6.

not that if the word of healing were only spoken, at whatever distance, his servant would at once be cured. The Nazarenes, like those who beset our Lord on the Cross, talked of Him insolently, and pressed rudely round Him, and challenged Him to do such miracles there, as they had heard of His doing in other places. It would appear that the Holy Scripture invites us to consider seriously this very remarkable difference between those to whom the Son of God first made His power known. There is a great deal in it, which it concerns us to apply to our own hearts and consciences; and the Church draws our attention to it on this day in particular, by appointing the history of the centurion to be read in the Gospel, along with our Saviour's warning; "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." These fearful words seem to tell us of a case not unlike that of the Nazarenes, or even more terrible. God grant that it may be none of ours! Let us then, following the guidance of the Church, see what warning we may obtain by setting these examples one against another, and considering both, steadily and at large.

And first, there is something surely, which may well cause very earnest thought in the saying that our Saviour *wondered* at both of them; both at the faith of the centurion, and at the unbelief of the Nazarenes. We know that, when we wonder at things, there is always something in them more than we can quite understand; they go deeper or higher,

reach farther for better or worse, that we can quite account for, or follow them. Our wondering then is part of our infirmity, as imperfect and created beings: and our Blessed Saviour's wondering and marvelling, as we read that He did on these two occasions, is an instance of His taking on Himself that infirmity and imperfection; as we know that He did in all points, except where it was blemished with sin. Otherwise He, the Creator and Watcher of all things, Who knows all for ever before it comes to pass, He cannot wonder in the same sense as mortal men do. But here we read that He did wonder. He, Who was both God and Man, wondered that a Gentile soldier should have so much faith, and those, among whom He had been Himself brought up, so little. Does not this shew us that in both there is a deep mystery: a mystery of godliness in the one, and a mystery of iniquity in the other? On the one hand, the children of Adam are naturally so far fallen from God, that for a person like that centurion, bred up quite beyond the reach of the kingdom of heaven, to exercise full faith in Jesus Christ, on first being made aware of Him, would seem to be almost an impossible thing. On the other hand, when He comes visibly so near any person, as He had been for thirty years near to His own townsmen at Nazareth, dwelling among them, even at their doors: how they should still be quite unbelievers, is surely one of the depths of Satan! Such unbelief is a kind of sin, which even the devils do not commit; for they are forced to believe, though they only tremble, without wholesome fear, love, or obedience; but these, the countrymen, neighbours, and kindred of the Son of

God, would not even see that there was anything remarkable in Him. "What is there," they said, "in this man, more than in any other?" "[b]Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon and Judas? And His sisters are they not all here with us?" In short, He was in their eyes but an ordinary person. And so it came to pass, that the very devils have more faith than those who were nearest to our Lord (except His blessed Mother) after the flesh. And this was an excess of unbelief so great and strange, that even He, Who knew all things, and knew beforehand that so it would be, even He marvelled at it.

Moreover, the wonder becomes greater in each case, when we come to consider the particulars. The centurion was a Gentile, brought up among those who worshipped other gods, or rather, as S. Paul describes it, had no hope, and were "without God in the world." He had faith, notwithstanding; and this seems to shew that no ignorance, no profaneness in a person's education, need keep him from owning and serving our Saviour, when better things are placed within his reach. Again, he was a soldier, a way of life which is very tempting to men of thoughtless and profane minds. If he, then, could find it in his heart to give himself up to Christ entirely, and to make it known that he did so, the excuse must be but vain, which we sometimes hear, that such a man's profession hinders him from serving God; it leads him into so much bad company, and fills his heart so entirely with other things! Surely if a Roman soldier, bred a heathen, could yet turn his heart to the truth of Christ and the hope of eternal life, a

[b] S. Matt. xiii. 55, 56.

Christian may do the same if he will, whatever his profession or trade, or however carelessly he may have been educated.

But further, this centurion had lived among Jews at a time when the Jews, as a people, were very degenerate, and had greatly fallen from that goodness which was to be expected in the only people who knew the true God. They were hypocritical, covetous, dissolute. The Name of God was very generally "[c] blasphemed among the Gentiles" because of them. They had abused their privileges, and that would be enough to make any but a very thoughtful mind think lightly of the privileges themselves. We see it daily, the more is our shame and sorrow, that because Holy Baptism and the other Blessed Sacrament are profaned by unworthy behaviour in those who have received them, men take occasion to think and speak disrespectfully of those divine ordinances themselves. So much was the faith of that centurion more to be admired by us, who could see the holiness, and justice, and goodness of God's law, through all the mischief and wickedness of those who professed, but did not practise it; who, even in such a place as Capernaum, had learned to love the Jews, because they were God's nation, and had builded them a synagogue, a place for God's solemn worship.

Again, and this was the point which most of all marked his faith in Christ at the time; he does not seem to have seen our Lord, but only to have heard of Him: he knew Him only at a distance: he had neither heard His wisdom, nor seen His mighty works, yet he had made up his mind to put entire confidence in Him. He might have heard perhaps

[c] Rom. ii. 24.

of that nobleman, who, from the same town of Capernaum, a little before, had gone to Jesus beseeching Him to come down ere his child die, and how our Lord, at many miles' distance, merely saying, "Thy son liveth," caused the fever to depart. This the centurion, it is likely, had heard of and believed; and putting all together, as a thoughtful person would do, he made no question that our Blessed Lord had full power over diseases, whether present, or absent; as much, and more than he ever had over his soldiers and servants. If they came and went at his bidding, much more would health and sickness come and go, at the bidding of the Son of God. Now if the heathen centurion could argue thus at so great a distance from our Lord, what are we to think of ourselves, who have been brought up so near to Him, have lived all our days under the shadow of His wing, and yet can hardly ever find it in our hearts to trust Him cheerfully with ourselves and our concerns, but think we must be always full of care and thought about our maintenance or ease or thriving in this world, as if we had no one to bear our burthens for us?

Then we may in some sort understand, by every day's shameful experience, how much above the common was that faith of the centurion, at which, we read, the Son of God marvelled. But we shall do well also to look into some of the circumstances attending the unbelief of His own countrymen, at which He marvelled no less. They knew His goodness from the beginning. He had come to live among them at two years old, and had gone on increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with

God and man. And though He had kept His divine glory under a cloud, yet it was impossible but His perfect goodness must, more or less, have made itself be seen: and they, therefore, of all men, we should have expected, would be readiest to believe Him, when He began to speak with authority, and to confirm His word with His many wonderful works. They might easily know more than others of the wonders of His birth, and of that of His forerunner S. John; concerning which it is said, "[d] All these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judæa." And to conclude, the people of Nazareth were better able than many others to answer one of the chief objections, which the Pharisaical unbelievers raised against our Saviour. When it was said[e], Can "Christ come out of Nazareth? Hath not the Scripture said that Christ cometh out of Bethlehem?" it was easy for the people of Nazareth to remember, that although Joseph and His Mother did live at Nazareth, yet He had not been born there. They had been called away to Bethlehem, just at the time of His birth, and so the prophecy had been fulfilled in Him, which persons, not knowing the circumstances, were so ready to bring up against Him. The unbelief then of the Nazarenes seems to have been owing to two things: first, that they cared little for such perfect and heavenly goodness, as they could not fail to have discerned in our Lord, ignorant as they were of His Most High and Divine Nature: next, that they cared not enough about such a very sacred and serious matter, as to enquire regarding our Lord's

[d] S. Luke i. 65.

[e] S. John vii. 41, 42.

birth, and find out, as they so easily might, that He was indeed of the town of Bethlehem, in that and in all other respects, answering to the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding Him.

Such being the wonderful depth of faith in the centurion, and of unbelief in the Jews of Nazareth, it is our duty particularly to observe our Lord's way of behaving in the two cases. Towards both He observed one and the same rule: to measure His gifts and graces, in a manner, by their faith. In this, as in every other part of His dealings with the children of men, He greatly regarded who were fit for the kingdom of God, and who not. His law was, "[f] Whosoever hath, to him shall be given:" and "whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath." Thus to the centurion, who came overflowing with faith, He on His part overflowed with grace. He was willing at first to come and heal his servant. But when the humble man declared himself unworthy that He should enter under his roof, then our Lord by a further and rarer exertion of His Almighty power, consented to "say in a word," being yet afar off, "and the servant was healed in the selfsame hour." Our Saviour's mercy kept pace, if one may so speak, with the centurion's confession of faith. As the one became more glorious and distinct, so did the other become more gracious. On the other hand, of the town of Nazareth these remarkable words are written, "[g] He could do no mighty works there," "because of their unbelief." He *could* not do them! He, Who is Almighty; He, with Whom all things are possible!

[f] S. Matt. xiii. 12.

[g] S. Mark vi. 5.

He could not do miracles among those stubborn unbelievers, even as He cannot lie. It would have been against the law and rule of His divine government. As He poured out His miraculous grace, more abundantly than usual, to meet the abundant faith of that good centurion, so He shut it up within the narrowest bounds, He all but entirely withdrew it, when He was among the unworthy Nazarenes, who had the scantiest possible portion of faith. A little faith there was even there. For "He laid His hands on a few sick folk and healed them," but as it was almost an unbelieving village, so it was almost without those marks by which He was used to declare Himself in every place, "[h]healing every sickness and every disease among the people."

Now in this, as was just now said, our Lord did but practise an universal law of His kingdom, viz. that His grace, though always a free gift (for how should His creatures ever win it of Him as a matter of right?), is yet always increased or diminished, in proportion as we make a good use of it, or no. Very slight helps and opportunities, well used, and made the most of, may do the greatest things in the end, may even prosper to the salvation of men's souls: while the highest and most heavenly gifts, neglected or profaned, will leave men most destitute at the end, and cause their portion to be with those who shall be beaten with many stripes. "Many shall come from the east, and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and gnashing

[h] S. Matt. ix. 35.

of teeth." All the poor Indians or Africans, who, from time to time, give in their names to Christ; every Jew and heathen that was ever converted, has his place in the kingdom of heaven, the Church and family of Jesus Christ, while many of those who were, by birth, on the very edge of that kingdom, the children of Christian parents, brought early to Baptism, and carefully instructed in all goodness, will lose their place in that kingdom for ever, and go where light and joy cannot come, and where repentance can do no good. The least privilege may be so improved, as to bring a great and endless blessing: the greatest so abused, as to end in everlasting misery. Such as that right-hearted centurion was, who saw Christ only from a distance, shall sit down in His kingdom, and *that* in no common place, but in company with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the greatest Saints of the Jewish Church: while such as Judas Iscariot, who sat at table with the Son of God, are fallen by transgression from their place, never to return. "[i] Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first."

Let us keep this aweful saying in our minds: for indeed we are all most nearly concerned in it. We, I say, who are here present, are nearly concerned in it, every one of us. For are we not all Christians? and as Christians, are we not *first* in the sense, in which our Blessed Lord spoke the word? Are we not in "[k] the Church of the first-born," whose names are "written in heaven," so united to Jesus Christ, that He counts us "bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh?" And if this be so, how can it be

[i] S. Matt. xix. 30. [k] Heb. xii. 23.

otherwise but that, if we do fall, our fall must be very grievous? It is not indeed easy to bring ourselves to this way of thinking. We are all naturally disposed to throw the blame of whatever goes amiss upon any thing rather than ourselves; to think too little of our privileges, and too well of our doings. Let us endeavour to be on our guard especially against this snare. When we have made the most of our disadvantages, yet we cannot make ourselves out to be in the condition of Pagans or Jews. That which cometh into our hearts cannot be at all, that we should "[1] be as the heathen" who never had grace to do better. We cannot unbaptize ourselves; we cannot undo the work of God's providence in making us children of the kingdom. Such we have been made, and we cannot help it. Let us then seriously ask ourselves; have we not often heard or read of dutifulness and goodness among mere heathen, much more among Jews, far beyond what we practise? Do we not allow ourselves in things, which, we know in our conscience, many of them would shrink from? There are whole nations of unbelievers in the world, who reckon it a part of their religion to abstain from strong drink, and hundreds and thousands of them do abstain. Will not every one of them rise up in judgement against the riotous and intemperate Christian, and condemn him at the last day? Again, even among our own acquaintance, do we not know persons with fewer advantages than we have, who keep God's commandments far better; more patient in deeper affliction; more forgiving under worse usage; kinder, with less

[1] Ezek. xx. 32.

to give away; more self-denying, greater under temptations to go wrong? Let us not flatter ourselves in judging of such matters. We are apt to say, perhaps they had less temptation to go wrong than we had: but we know not their temptations, nor our own helps. One thing we know, that the grace of God, which is made sure to us as Christians, is able to do all things, if we would make all the use we might of it. When we are comparing ourselves with our brethren, as we can hardly help doing sometimes, let us always suspect our comparisons, except they tend to our own disadvantage. Let us always in every case turn them into lessons of humility: it will be in our power to do so, if we will. With these and with all our other thoughts let us endeavour to mix up the aweful thought of the Last Judgement, which we know will very soon be here and force us to think of it. It will be little comfort then, to have pacified and quieted our reproving consciences by fancying ourselves better, or no worse than our neighbours; but it will be much, if we have judged ourselves in time, so as not to be judged of the Lord: if we have humbled and corrected ourselves by the good example of those, who were less favoured, but served God better than we; remembering that we are nearer to Christ than even those Nazarenes were, at whose unbelief He marvelled. What then will be His sentence on us, and what a wonder and reproach shall we be, in the sight of His holy Angels and Saints for ever, if we shall be found at the last to have led careless and unbelieving lives!

SERMON XLVI.

THE HEALING TOUCH OF CHRIST OUR LORD.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

S. Matt. viii. 3.

"*And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*"

Still it is Epiphany, my brethren, and again the Church tells us of a special manifestation of the Lord Jesus, God made Man to redeem and save us. Last Sunday you heard how He changes all good things for the better: the Law for the Gospel, earth for Heaven. Now you have heard, how He changes the worst of evils for the greatest good. To change water into wine, our earthly good things into heavenly, the law into the Gospel, that indeed was an astonishing miracle: but to change and renew man's nature, utterly poisoned and corrupted by sin, back again into the Image of God; that, as you perceive at once, was a still greater wonder, a work of more amazing mercy; and of this work, my brethren, our Lord gave a token, as often as He cleansed any of the lepers who then abounded among the Jews. And the first instance, related in the Gospels, of His cleansing any leper is that which is related in the Gospel for to-day. Our Lord was in one of the cities

of Galilee, in His first progress through that country, the first year of His ministry; "and behold there came a leper." It was a very bad case, "[a]a man *full* of leprosy." He was in the very greatest of distress, he besought our Lord, and kneeled down to Him, and fell upon his face; and this was his prayer; though in words it was not a prayer—"Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." In sound, as you perceive, it was no prayer; it was merely a confession of faith, faith in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ to cleanse him. But here a man may ask two questions. If the leper so earnestly longed for cleansing, as he plainly did by the whole of his behaviour, why did he not at once ask for it in so many words? Why did he not distinctly say, "[b]Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed;" "cleanse me and I shall be cleansed?" Instead of saying, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," why did he not say, "O Lord, speak the word, and make me clean?" It was no want of faith in Christ's power, for his word is "If Thou wilt, Thou canst." It must have been, because his heart told him, it was but too likely that our Lord might not have the *Will* to cleanse him. Here then comes in the other question, Why should he doubt our Saviour's Will? For he knew by what he heard, perhaps by what he saw, how good Jesus of Nazareth was, how He went about doing good, and "[c]healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." Why should He not heal this leper, as well as Peter's wife's mother, or the nobleman's son, or the man possessed with a devil in the synagogue of Caper-

[a] S. Luke v. 12. [b] Jer. xvii. 14. [c] S. Matt. iv. 23.

naum, or any others whom the leper might likely enough have heard of? Well, the reason perhaps might be this. It does not appear, as if our Lord had as yet healed any leper; this poor man is the first mentioned, as coming to Him under that particular distemper. Now there is no doubt, that the children of Israel considered leprosy as an especial punishment of sin, more than they did most other diseases: and it would seem from the Old Testament, from the case of Miriam the sister of Moses, and of king Uzziah, that there was enough to lead their thoughts that way. We may well believe therefore, that this poor man regarded his leprosy as a just judgement for the sins, of which his conscience was afraid; and went about so humbled and ashamed, that he hardly dared pray for deliverance; the rather if, as is very likely, he had heard something of the high and heavenly commandments, which Christ had been uttering on the Mount, with all authority. The very echo of that Voice might have brought him down prostrate on the knees of his heart, as it has thousands of sinners since; thinking, "If the law is so holy, whatever shall I do, who am nothing but sin all over?" Moreover he might think to himself (for so the Jews commonly thought, and perhaps this also was true in their days), that there was no healing of leprosy except by miracle; by the immediate act of God Almighty Himself; and this again would make his request seem bolder; and altogether, not in unbelief but in humility, he might naturally not feel sure, whether He Who can cure all, would see fit to make him clean; and so, instead of praying, he

merely casts himself down, and says, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst." Not another word does he add.

And what says the Blessed Jesus to this? O my brethren, may the words sink deep into every one of our hearts, yours and mine, and every sinner on earth; and He cause us to hear them again and again, as often as our poor souls need it! But then we must come to Him as the leper did, "trusting not in our own worthiness, but in His manifold and great mercies." The words, as you know, are, "I will; be thou clean." "I will," because the poor man had said, "If Thou wilt:" "Be thou clean;" because he had said, "Thou canst make me clean." O Divine, Almighty words! Who could have ventured to utter such, but He Who spake the like words, and the world was created, "Let there be light, and there was light?" Did not the Angels standing by know the Voice, and wonder and adore? And shall not we do the like, when, in a moment, we see the miserable disease cured, and the most foul cleansed, and he who, a few moments before, lay on the ground, in his own eyes and the eyes of his friends, a miserable and most impure outcast, when we see him lifted up in a moment by the touch and voice of the Great Physician, cured wonderfully, cured for ever, free to worship among God's people, and to return thanks in His House, his whole heart full of Christ, full of Him Who has wrought such a wonder on him, so that he *cannot* be silent, he *must* in some way tell every one, that it is Jesus that hath made him whole? O my brethren, will you not praise God for this? Yes indeed, you must; you cannot but praise Him

unless you are altogether false, vain, hypocritical Christians, unless all your hope of Eternal life in our Lord Jesus Christ is come to be a mere dream. For, my brethren, it is your own case, it is your own cure, that you have been hearing of. You are, each one of you, this leper: and well is it for those who felt it in their very hearts, when the Church began speaking of him in the day's Gospel. God grant that you may have said to yourselves, "That leper is I: his cure is God's mercy to me:" and that so you may have joined as earnestly as ever you could in the good words of joy and thanksgiving, with which, according to old custom, we acknowledge God's mercy in giving us His saving message by His own Son, and not by another; "Thanks be to God for His Gospel."

But in this particular Gospel of the leper, there is one thing, which I have not mentioned, of the greatest consequence to be known and remembered, since without it you will never rightly understand or value, either your own duty or God's mercy. What is this sacred and most important thing? It is this: that our Lord did not only *speak* to the leper, but *touched* him. "Jesus put forth His hand and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean." Our Almighty Saviour can heal afar off, as well as near; as He Himself reminds us in the Prophet; "[a] Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?" and in the very next wonder, which S. Matthew relates, He healed the Centurion's servant at a distance. But it pleased Him to heal this leper, as indeed He seems to have wrought the more part

[a] Jer. xxiii. 23.

of His miracles, by actual touch of His Blessed Body. In the case of this leper, there might be this special reason for doing so, that lepers were unclean by the Law of Moses, and our Lord's Will was to do away with all such uncleanness. And, again, it would be the deepest comfort to the poor man, coming to Christ, as he did, so *very* weary and heavy-laden, not only to hear His gracious Voice, but to feel His loving and powerful Hand laid upon him; which, in one moment, more than made up for all the sad and painful separation, which from time to time must have gone to his heart, ever since he had his leprosy.

But besides, we are not to doubt, that there is a very deep Gospel meaning and mystery hid under those few words which to us sound so very plain. "Jesus put forth His Hand and touched him." His touching that leper, my brethren, was a sure token and example, that not without the spiritual Touch of His Blessed Body can the leprosy of sin be cured.

For sin is a leprosy; a terrible leprosy, a leprosy, incurable by earthly physicians. There is no question at all of it. If you doubt it, my brethren, if any of you fancy himself, as he is in himself, not so very hideous and hateful in God's sight, let him think of the worst thing, he has ever heard of any body's doing; the sins of Sodom and Gomorrha in the Old Testament; the sins of those wretched persons, whom we have lately, alas! heard so much of in India; nay, and I will add too the sin of Judas Iscariot himself. You do not surely doubt, that these sins left a leprous mark upon the souls of the doers of them. Now our Lord has expressly told you, that the sin of Sodom was not so bad as your's, if you

turn a deaf ear to Him. "[b] If the mighty works, which were done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day." Is not this Christ's word? You know it is: you cannot deny it. Well then, my poor brother or sister, whoever you are that for any reason set yourself against the good things of Christ, I must tell you plainly, you are at this moment a wretched leper in God's sight; your soul defiled with the same kind of miserable leprosy, as you yourself perceive in the wretched people of Sodom, or (still worse) in Judas Iscariot. And as for those who have a little faith, and *are* trying to please Christ and save their souls, I need not tell them, for they know it too well already, that there is something in them, something very strong, which sets itself against salvation: and what is that, but the remainder of their original leprosy, the foul disease of the heart, which we have contracted one and all, from our father Adam?

Let me put it to you in this way, my brethren. We do not how far Angels may be permitted to read the hearts of men: but I suppose there is no doubt, that if an Angel were standing in this place, he would be able to discern much more truly and clearly than any man, to which of these two classes, each one of you belongs at this moment. Every congregation may be divided in a way into the two sorts of people whom I have just described. You are either careless about our Lord Jesus Christ, or you think at least, that you have in some measure turned to Him. Now would he not say to both sorts, Remember your leprosy, be it entire or only partial: if

[b] S. Matt. xi. 23.

you forget or neglect it, it will spread and corrupt, and become wholly incurable. There is but one thing to be done with it; bring it to your Saviour, yes, bring it to our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever you are, you can do *that*. For He, by His Church, by His Word, and His Spirit, still goeth about doing good. In whatever city or village or open place you are, He is there also: His Power is present to cleanse you: but not, if you proudly pass by Him, or scornfully turn your back upon, or falsely apply to Him, with no real desire to be cleansed. No, brethren, such as these must be content to be, where Naaman the Syrian would have been, if he had not "done according to the saying of the man of God." But you, my brethren, will not be such: you will not ungratefully reject your loving Physician, Who is even now putting forth His Hand to touch you in all the filth of your sins, on Whose lips even now the blessed words are preparing to be spoken to you, "I will, be thou clean." You will make much of your sins, that He may make little of them. You will not come here, praising yourself in your heart. What a thing it would have been, if the leper, lying on his face before our Lord, and saying those humble words with his mouth, had been considering in his secret soul, how much better he was doing than such another one, who perhaps might, in our Lord's sight, be just as fit to be healed as himself.

Finally, the true penitent leper, he whom Christ is really about to heal, will do every thing according to the order of Christ. He will remember that our Lord's cure of sin is wrought by Touch as well as by Word. He does not merely say, "be thou clean,"

but He puts forth His Hand and touches the sinner. How does He touch him? First by Holy Baptism, and this touch of Christ you all know and believe: you all learn it the very first thing in your catechism, By Baptism we are made "members of Christ," "[c] members of His Body, of His Flesh, and of His Bones." And this touch of Christ you all acknowledge and believe. You would think it a shocking and fearful thing, to die unbaptized yourself, or to suffer one of your little ones to die unbaptized. And you are very right. For Baptism is the first touch of Christ, and without it, in a regular way, there is no healing our spiritual leprosy, sin. But why do you not go on with the same good thought, both for yourselves and for your children? How is it that you do not perceive, that the continual Touch, the inward Touch of our Lord's Body in the Holy Eucharist, is as necessary as the first Touch of the same Body in Holy Baptism? Spiritual nourishment, as necessary as Spiritual Birth? O consider this, ye that shrink from Holy Communion or encourage your children to do so. You know not what harm you are doing to yourselves, and to those whom you love best. Jesus Christ, God made Flesh, He is at hand to touch your very soul with the inward and spiritual Touch of His own Body and Blood. In this one way He means to be All in all to you. You are lying as helpless lepers before Him. He offers to touch you and to say, "I will, be thou clean." God forbid that any of you should answer "I have no will, I do not care to be clean." And yet this is really your answer, if you go on excusing yourselves, and trifling with His gracious offers.

[c] Eph. v. 30.

SERMON XLVII.

OUR LORD'S POWER OVER THE UNSEEN WORLD.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

S. MARK i. 27.

"*What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits, and they do obey Him.*"

HITHERTO the Gospels for the Sundays after Epiphany have set our Lord and Saviour before us, as King and Governor of the world which we see. The stars of heaven proclaimed His Royalty on the Day of the Epiphany itself. The doctors of the Temple witnessed His Divine Knowledge, according to the Gospel of the first Sunday after the Epiphany. The second Sunday manifested Him turning water into wine at Cana, and so giving a token of His purpose to make all things new. The third, that is last Sunday, manifested Him, as the perfect and unfailing Physician of the souls and bodies of all those, whether Jew or Gentile, who come to Him in true faith, and abide with Him in true obedience. And now, going on, as it were, from glory to glory, to-day's Gospel opens to us a new and most astonishing field of His saving power. He shews Himself in it, as King of the invisible world. Spirits, as well as men, are proved subject to His command. He

exercises the same power over Satan and his angels in their prisons of darkness, as over men here on earth, and over the elements of this world. "[a] Hell is naked before Him, and destruction hath no covering:" "[b] destruction and death say, We have heard His fame with our ears." He is as strong and as merciful to save His elect from the Evil spirits who wait around out of sight, as from the bodily evils which they see, and feel near at hand. He can defend as well from "the pestilence which walketh in darkness," as from the "[c] sickness which destroyeth in the noon-day."

This, I say, seems to be the especial purpose of the Church in the Gospel for this Sunday, containing as it does that astonishing history of our Lord's casting out the unclean spirits, and permitting them to go into the herd of swine. It was not merely done for the relief of those who were afflicted with them. *That* would have been as well accomplished, I suppose, without their going into the herd of swine. But clearly it was our Lord's will to shew His disciples, once for all, His entire command of the unclean spirits, as well as our own great and continual danger from them, had we not His mighty Hand and outstretched Arm to protect us. *That* was the great point, that Jesus of Nazareth should be declared Lord Almighty of the great deep, of death and hell, as well as of heaven, and earth, and sea.

And to prepare the way for this great miracle, one almost as great went before it. He stilled the waves of the sea with a word. Observe the wonderful circumstances of that miracle. In the evening of a

[a] Job xxvi. 6. [b] Ib. xxviii. 22. [c] Ps. xci. 6.

most wearisome day, during the whole of which it seems that He had no rest, being employed either in healing the sick, or in teaching the multitude by parables, He gave commandment to depart unto the other side. "[d] And there came down a great storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy." It was a sudden rush of wind, such as is very common, and very dangerous, in waters that are nearly or quite surrounded by the land. The disciples, being most of them fishermen, were used to such things, and therefore would not easily be alarmed: but this time they saw the danger was great, very far more than usual. And where was our gracious Saviour in the midst of their alarm? Who can understand, who can realise it? He, the Eternal, the All-knowing, the Almighty, wearied with that toilsome day, had laid down in the boat for a little rest. "[e] He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow;" and they came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we perish: carest Thou not that we perish?" "Save us, for we are perishing." It is like the cries in the Psalmist, "[f] Up, Lord, why sleepest Thou? Awake, and be not absent from us for ever. Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face, and forgettest our misery and trouble?" Never yet was the Merciful One deaf to such prayers. In a moment He raises Himself, and first gently rebukes them, "[g] Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" then more peremptorily rebukes the wind, and saith unto the sea, "Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." Nowhere

[d] S. Luke viii. 23. [e] S. Mark iv. 38. [f] Ps. xliv. 23, 24. [g] S. Mark iv. 39.

perhaps in our Lord's history, except in the very point of His Passion did His weakness, as Son of Man, appear so closely joined with His Almightiness as Son of God. One moment He is asleep on a pillow, tired down like a mere mortal: the next moment, He shews Himself Creator of the waters, God and Lord of all the creatures; the same, Whose Spirit moved at first upon the waters of the great deep, and began to bring them into order, when they were "without form and void." Hardly any one of His miracles appears to have caused so deep wonder in His disciples. They feared and were amazed, and said, one to another; "[h]What manner of man is this?" Or rather, "what country, what home does He belong to?" "for He commandeth even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?" They thought perhaps of the sayings of the Old Testament, Who it is that "[i]stilleth the raging of the sea, and the noise of his waves;" Whose "[k]way is in the sea, and His paths in the great waters;" Who saith to the deep, "[l]Hitherto shalt thou go and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." They felt in their hearts, how near *He* was come to them, Who is the Great God of heaven and earth: and who can imagine the thrilling awe, to look upon Him so close at hand, to find themselves on the dark sea, alone with Him in the same slight vessel: and, although just saved by His Power, yet trembling at the thought of Who He was, and who, and what they were, how unworthy to be near Him, how much more fit to make such a prayer as one of them before

[h] S. Luke viii. 25. [i] Ps. lxv. 7. [k] Ib. lxxvii. 19. [l] Job xxxviii. 11.

made in the same situation; "[m] Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Yet even this miracle, great as it was, appears to have been but a preparation for the greater one which was immediately to follow. I say, the greater one: for surely to command and overrule the bad angels, the powers of the unseen world, is a greater thing even to our imaginations, than quieting the winds and waters. And as the vast sea is even to the eye, as we look on it, an image of that infinite, eternal world out of sight, so our Lord's ordering the sea may have been an intended image of His authority and power, to order that world of Angels. The one great deep is the shadow of the other; and the same Word made, and rules both. Accordingly we find that the form of speech was very nearly the same, whether men were uttering their wonder at the quieting of the sea, or at the casting out of devils. When He bade the waves be still, they said, as you have just heard, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" When He first cast out a devil, S. Mark in the text tells us, the bystanders were all amazed, and inquired one of another saying, "What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? for with authority and power He commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they do obey Him." Their wonder breaks out, on both occasions, in almost the same manner of utterance; as indeed the two acts belong to the same Divine Power and Goodness, though one is more aweful than the other, because it has to do with the world of spirits, and not with this visible world only.

[m] S. Luke v. 8.

Consider the circumstances of this second miracle. It was most likely early morning, by the time the vessel came to the other side of the lake; for the storm, I suppose, happened during the night. Our Lord then and His disciples landing in the early morning on the other side, the first persons that met Him were "two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way." What was this possession with devils, of which we read so much in the New Testament? We cannot exactly say what it was, or is, but thus much is very plain concerning it, that, in many of the symptoms, it was very like the condition of those, who are unhappily out of their mind. All the mercy therefore, which our Lord shewed to any of the possessed, is a token and pledge of His great and never-failing care over those whose senses are disordered. In fevers for example, and in many other complaints, how distressing is it for the time to hear the sick persons wandering as they do! But depend upon it, they are not left to themselves: the Healer of sick souls, as well as of sick bodies, is with them. "He tells," as the Psalmist says[n], "all their flittings; He puts their tears into His bottle; these things are all noted in His Book." He waits to be gracious and merciful to us, as soon as ever our own faith, or the faith of our friends, is such as He delights to answer. And never need men despair of His mercy; not in the worst of cases, not in the worst of times; men, I mean, who try to be penitent. Could any case be worse than is described in the following sentences, "There met

[n] Ps. lvi. 8.

Him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way;" one of whom, for a long time, had had not one evil spirit but many, so that he said, his name was Legion, and this one wore no clothes, nor abode in any house, but in the tombs; "[o] no man could bind him, no not with chains, because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains were torn in sunder of him, and the fetters broken in pieces, and no man could master him; and always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones."

See here, what the Evil one will do, if we once permit him to have dominion over us. He will strip us of our clothes, of that holy robe of Baptism, which is all in all to us, so long as we keep it pure. He will not let us abide in any house, no, not in the Church of the Living God, the most sacred and comfortable abode of Christ and His Saints. He will not let men be good and happy at home, but encourages restless feelings of every kind. He drives them out among the tombs; teaches them to scorn the safe shelter, the happy home which God has provided, and to wander "[p] in desolate places like dead men:" to feel their way about the miserable paths of this world, where all at best is dead and helpless, and can do them no real good.

See next how this wicked one persuades his unhappy servants to deal with themselves. Always, day and night, this man was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

[o] S. Mark v. 3–5.

[p] Is. lix. 10.

So those who listen to Satan become proud, envious, anxious, and murmuring; neither God nor man can please them; they punish and torment themselves far more than any one else.

And most especially see, how the same Evil master instructs people to deal with their best Friend and only Deliverer. When the possessed man saw Jesus afar off, he ran, and fell down before Him, and crying with a loud voice, said, "What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of the Most High God?" "Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?" "I beseech Thee, torment me not." Thus Satan, when he finds that Jesus Christ is coming very near to men, if he cannot hinder their seeing and knowing Him, and outwardly falling down before Him, will yet put it in their hearts to wish Him away from them. If they do not say, "What have we to do with Thee?" yet secretly they would be glad to be heathens, and to have nothing to do with Christ, that they might sin more at their ease. Why, when men are reproved for notorious sin by parents or masters, or old and grave friends and neighbours, or more especially by the pastors of Christ's flock, they almost make answer in these very words of the Evil one; "I beseech thee, torment me not." When they are set upon their own ways, and try to drive Christ from them, and drown, if one may say so, the voice of His Church, they bear witness against themselves, what sort of a spirit has got hold of them. God help them! For no one besides can.

Observe further (and it is a very serious, and ought to be to many of us a very painful and alarm-

ing thought;) observe, I say what sort of a spirit or devil this was; he was an unclean spirit. It does not say a wicked, a cruel, a blaspheming spirit; but an *unclean* one. Does not this word tell us something about what sort of sins are perhaps likeliest of any to bring men under the power and dominion of Satan? Does it not teach us who is near, close at hand, lurking for our lives, when we are tempted, as most men at times have been, with impure thoughts, coming we knew not how, interfering perhaps with the most sacred meditations and employments? Or when temptations, opportunities, remembrances, hints, provocations to sin, appear to meet men at every turn, as it were, and to leave them no rest: can we doubt, whose doing it all is, or hesitate to cast ourselves with all our heart upon Him Who used to say of old, "Come out of the man?" So turning towards Jesus Christ, we take that "shield of faith," which He hath promised shall be able to "[q] quench all the fiery darts of the Evil one."

That is Christ's promise; and one sure token of its accomplishment is our reading and hearing in the Gospel such very aweful miracles as what took place when the two possessed met our Saviour. Presently He commanded the unclean spirits to come out of them. They besought Him much, not to send them into the deep; i. e. not at present to order them away to their place of torment. And they asked leave to go into a herd of swine which was feeding hard by. "Then went the devils out of the man and entered into the swine;" thus shewing

[q] Eph. vi. 16.

that Satan bears malice to the dumb creatures, as well as to man, and that Christ sometimes allows him to exercise that malice. And who knows how much of the mischief done at times by brute beasts, especially in a sudden unaccountable way, may be rightly attributed to the Evil one, let loose for our trial?

Once more, observe the consequences of Satan's having so far his own way. "The whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and were choked in the waters." Here we see a little pattern, an example, how the wicked one would be glad to treat us, did our Lord at all give him way. He would not give us time to think, but would hurry us on into deadly sin, and cause us to die in the same. He would entice us to the edge of the steep, and then cause us to rush violently down it, with no power to stop ourselves, until we have perished in the gulf beneath. And he is ever at hand, waiting to do us this mischief. He is like a roaring lion that walketh about the fold to catch up and devour the stray sheep. Where we least think, there he lies in wait, "[r] like a lion greedy of his prey, or a lion's whelp lurking in secret places!" So he is "[s] waiting in our way on every side, turning his eyes down to the ground." The holy Psalms are full of such warnings concerning the Wicked one, and of prayers to God to deliver us from him: and one reason why the Church uses us to learn and say the Psalms so diligently, is, because they so greatly help us to watch and pray against him.

Let us then do so, my brethren. Night and day, let

[r] Ps. xvii. 12. [s] Ib. 11.

us keep our souls awake and our hearts lifted up to God. I suppose we all remember that, as children, we were, we ourselves know not how, afraid, and unwilling to be left in the dark. Let this be a token to us of the fear and care, with which Christ would have us draw back from Satan, the prince and power of darkness. Let us draw back accordingly: let us not venture within the edge of his dominion. Let us renounce him, as we have promised and vowed, not almost, but altogether. Let us not venture on small sins; for that is allowing Satan to tempt us on to the edge of that steep place. Let us, above all things, keep our hearts clean; for that is the surest way to drive the unclean spirit from us in despair. As there were stories of old, that a lion would not hurt a chaste maiden, so this roaring lion can take no hold of a devout virgin heart. If you strive in earnest to keep yourself inwardly and outwardly pure, you may say to him in the Name of Jesus, "Get thee hence," and he shall depart, where he can have more of his own way; nor shall he ever be able to do you harm, so long as you continue with our Lord, clothed with His righteousness, and practising His right and pure mind, either sitting at His Feet, or letting His light, by your good works, shine before men: as we read of the possessed person in this Gospel, that he was found with Jesus, "[t] sitting and clothed, and in his right mind;" and that, when he did leave Him, it was at His command, to tell his friends how great things Christ our God had done unto him.

[t] S. Mark v. 15.

SERMON XLVIII.

THE FRAILTY OF OUR NATURE.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

S. JAMES iii. 2.

"In many things we offend all."

THE Collect for this day acknowledges, that "by reason of the frailty of our nature, we cannot always stand upright." That is to say, that because we are born weak and feeble, both in body and soul, there is no chance but we must often fall into error, and calamity, and sin. But we are not therefore to be too much cast down, as if we were left to wander alone in darkness, no one to help us and feel for us, stumbling on, as we may, and with no better strength than our own to recover ourselves by. God be praised, that is not our case. There is One Who knows all our wants and weaknesses, far better than we do ourselves. "[a] He knoweth, whereof we are made: He remembereth that we are but dust." He knoweth us "to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers;" He knoweth how frail our nature is; how impossible it is for us always to stand upright. He knoweth it, for He hath vouchsafed to become one of us: one of us, in every thing but sin. He knoweth every thing about our temptations, except consenting to them in the very least degree. He hath told us,

[a] Ps. ciii. 14.

how entirely He knows and even feels for us, on purpose that we, being assured of His providence, should never give ourselves up. In our many and great dangers, unable of ourselves to stand upright, He invites us to pray to Him, in the hope that He will "support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations." Our dangers and temptations are our very ground of hope. We cry out with the Psalmist, "[b]Look upon my adversity and misery, and forgive me all my sin." "[c]Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, and hear me: for I am poor and in misery." "[d]The sorrows of my heart are enlarged; O bring Thou me out of my troubles." O infinite mercy of our God, making the very depth of our affliction the foundation of our trust, and the reason why our prayer should be hopeful: provided only we trust Him, and pray to Him, in earnest.

Our bodily pains and perils are intended, by His grace, to make us feel, more deeply than we should otherwise, the perilous condition of our souls. Here, in the text, we have the word of an Apostle, speaking for himself and for all, the most perfect of Christians. "In many things we offend all." We offend, that is, we stumble, we err, we sin: and in order that we may never forget this our natural frailty and feebleness of soul, we are made to experience from time to time, how frail and feeble our bodies are. Sickness, pain, hunger, thirst, weariness, intense cold or heat, the feeling of weakness or decay, all have naturally a humbling effect upon the mind: they make us feel and own, how very helpless we are: they dispose us in a manner to fear sin, as well as sorrow.

[b] Ps. xxv. 17. [c] Ib. lxxxvi. 1. [d] Ib. xxv. 16.

But even these bodily ills, plain and manifold as they are on every side of us, fail in general to convince us of our own weakness, until we feel them ourselves. Men in health and strength are too apt to forget Who it is that makes them to differ from the sickliest and the weakest. You may see in them often a kind of unbelieving haughtiness, not unlike that which is the ruin of rich men, when they say to themselves, "[e] Tomorrow shall be as this day, and yet more abundant." So the able-bodied labourer or artizan, who has never known sickness, may be found not uncommonly trusting to the strength of his own arm, and thinking, as Israel was tempted to think in Canaan; "[f] My power, and the might of mine hand hath gotten me" these comforts, and will continue to get them. I really believe that great bodily power, and unusual skill in trade or labour, is a very serious trial of men's faith; a thing, which the devil knows too well how to turn into a snare, unless corrected by the grace of God. It makes men presumptuous concerning themselves, and uncharitable in regard of others. They trust in themselves to find work and make it profitable, forgetting that, without God's blessing, they cannot go on a moment: some slip or fall may take place, and in one instant they may be disabled for life. Men do not think of such dangers, they do not pray constantly against them, they are not thankful to be preserved from them; and thus their prosperity in their work makes them presumptuous. It is also apt to make them uncharitable: for healthy people find it hard to enter into the feelings of the sick, and pity them as they

[e] Is. lvi. 12. [f] Deut. viii. 17.

ought to do: neither can the strong easily make allowance for the weak. They too often go on indulging their high spirits, and missing many thousands of blessed opportunities of charity. That happens more or less to us all, in our days of health and strength, which Moses describes as the sin of the Israelites in prosperity. "[g]Jeshurun (that is Israel) waxed fat, and kicked." He forgat God his Saviour, and "lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." So we, in our prosperity, lightly esteem our Saviour, present among us by His poor and afflicted; we forget that we are every moment entirely in His Hand.

He therefore, Who cannot forget us, graciously reminds us of our true condition by sending afflictions upon us, or upon those dear to us. "For this cause," we may venture to say with the Apostle, "[h]many are weak and sickly among" us, "and many sleep." Many are the sicknesses, many the separations and bereavements, which are sent on us, to wean us from our worldly mind, by Him Who "[i]doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." Many, again, the hair-breadth escapes, as they are called, and wonderful unexpected interferences of a gracious Providence, delivering us, when we were on the very point of perishing; such as no one, who has any faith in God, any sense of religion at all, can well pass over, without lifting up his heart to Him, and feeling that, here too, he is solemnly warned against trusting in himself or any thing on earth. Few persons, I suppose, have lived to any considerable age, without being more or less often in peril of their lives or limbs by sudden unforeseen

[g] Deut. xxxii. 15. [h] 1 Cor. xi. 30. [i] Lam. iii. 33.

accidents, from which the hand of God, no strength nor foresight of their own, was, they must allow, their only deliverance.

Of course, as I said, unless they are utterly unbelieving, such mercies fill them with a sincere sense of God's watchful Providence over them in matters relating to this world. But if they be thoughtful believers in Christ, there is another thought which will naturally come over them, upon all such sudden turns of Providence, for mercy or for judgement. They will think in themselves; "My soul, left to itself, is as helpless as my body, and God has been now shewing me, how entirely my body depends on Him; surely it is His will, that I should consider more than ever, how much I need Him for my soul. Surely this accident, or this narrow escape, should remind me of the worse accidents, which are continually threatening my inward, my immortal life: and of the more aweful heart-thrilling escapes, by which the grace of God is so often withdrawing me from the edge of the pit of hell, when I have wandered, alas! too near it." For if, in respect of our being here, as we are taught by the aweful saying in the Prayer Book, "In the midst of life we are in death," no less certainly, in respect of our eternal welfare, are we daily on the verge of ruin, since "in many things we offend all;" our souls can no more go on for a moment without God's special grace, than our bodies and estates without His special Providence.

This is the right use to be made of the Apostle's saying, "In many things we offend all:" confirmed, as it is, by the sad experience of every day and hour

of our lives. It should make us very diligent in prayer, very watchful not to offend. It should not make us, as I fear it has helped to make many, careless and reckless about our goings on, as though, do what we will, we were under a kind of necessity of sinning. Who has not heard this sort of sentiment before now, when unthinking Christians have been speaking of their own past lives? "To be sure," say they, "we are all sinners, and I have sinned like the rest; but I hope God will be merciful." And so they pass lightly over very serious sins indeed: and it is to be feared, that not a few, trusting to this plea of the frailty of their nature, pass into the other world, with a repentance fearfully and miserably imperfect. It may help to guard us against this great danger, if we attend carefully to the Apostle's true meaning, where he says of such as himself, "In many things we offend all." He does not mean, "In many things we all go on, committing grievous deadly sin;" God forbid! He cannot mean that. How should the Apostles and friends of Christ, go on, all their lives, in ways which, as they themselves taught, would shut them out of the kingdom of heaven? But by "offending" he here means stumbling, or tripping: not stumbling, so as to fall: not, therefore, so much as wilful sin; for that is a fall, though it need not be always deadly; but even as, in a rough way, he who walks most strongly and steadily must expect sometimes through various accidents, to dash his foot against a stone, or root, or other obstacle of that kind, so even the saints of God, in their most perfect condition here, must not expect to be free from some kind of sin. But what kind? Not

falls, but merely stumblings; a hasty word now and then; a moment of anger or dislike or repining or self-satisfaction, repented of as soon as felt; occasional want of exactness in observing rules of piety; little touches of sloth, or impatience, or indulgence of bodily appetite; inattention at prayers, not mended as soon as it might have been: all such sins, in a word, as wise and good men have been used to call pardonable infirmities. The Apostle himself especially mentions inconsiderate words, slips of the tongue. "If any man offend not," stumble not, slip not, "in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body." He seems to teach us that, although we must never flatter ourselves, that we are quite clear from such offences, and though the best of us is so far inexcusable, in that he might, through God's grace, be still better than he is: yet there is no saying how near, by the same grace, a really devout, watchful, self-denying person may approach to actual perfection. Only it is quite certain, that the more perfect he really became, the less he would think of his own doings, for as he mounted up higher, and nearer to the saints, he would still see more and more that he ought to do: God's Holy Spirit, given to him more abundantly, would shew him more and more of his duty: he would therefore be more and more disquieted at his having done so little hitherto. And thus it has ever come to pass, that the holiest persons and those whom God has most delighted to honour, have thought and spoken most severely of themselves, calling themselves, and really judging themselves to be, "unprofitable servants," and "the chief of sinners." But let us beware of imagining,

when we read such sayings, that they really went on in direct and wilful breaking of the commandments, or in any impure, unrighteous, unholy habit. Had they done so, instead of being saints, they could not have continued within Christ's covenant at all. For the very essence of that covenant is and was from the beginning, "that we being delivered from" our evil habits, and other "enemies, might serve Christ, without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life."

When therefore we read, or hear, or feel very much of the frailty of our nature: when we mark S. James saying, "In many things we offend all;" or S. John, "[k] If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves;" when we meet with the passionate complaints of good and holy men at all times, blaming themselves so severely, as vile intolerable persons; let us see to it, that the devil tempt us not to make an unholy use of such thoughts and sayings. Let us try to make the same use of them that the good men themselves, of whom we are speaking, did. Instead of finding in our frailty an excuse for falling, let it be a reason to us, why we should pray the more earnestly for grace to stand upright. Instead of saying, "This or that devout man was, by his own account, a vile sinner, therefore I need the less mind my own sins," let us say, "If those holy men, enlightened by God's Spirit, mourned so bitterly over their own doings, what would they have said, had they doings like mine to mourn over? If their slips made them more diligent in prayer, surely our falls should make us

[k] 1 S. John i. 8.

so. If their little oversights caused them to double the watch they kept on themselves, much more our great and wilful transgressions. If a mere passing thought of evil humbled them in the dust, and brought back, as it were, the burden of the worst things they had ever done; how ought we to feel, if unhappily we have not left off indulging and harbouring bad thoughts?"

In this way, an earnest person may, by God's exceeding grace, turn his very slips in time past, into securities for the time to come. "Fractures well cured," it has been said, "make us more strong." At any rate, the memory of them ought in all reason to make us more careful. And so the prayer of David, the great Penitent, may be fulfilled in every repenting Christian, "[1] Make me to hear of joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice." It was fulfilled in David himself, in that the remembrance of his deadly fall kept him humble in heart, and forgiving to those who wronged him. It was fulfilled in the holy S. Peter, who could never pardon himself for his hasty denials of his Lord, and begged to be crucified with his head downwards, as a token that he was quite unworthy to suffer with Him.

Brethren, let me speak seriously to you, to each one, as it were in his ear, apart. Do you really think yourself a better man than David or S. Peter? Are you really sure that you have done nothing, left nothing undone, which you ought to mourn for, as long as you live? Are you quite certain that there is no one in the next world, who will be the

[1] Ps. li. 8.

worse for ever, for having known you, and been helped and encouraged in some deadly sin? Did you never tempt any one, by word, by deed or by example, to be unclean, or drunken, to be dishonest, profane, or spiteful? Did you never so behave yourself, as that you can have no doubt, if God had taken you at the moment, but that you would have been now in everlasting chains? Or at least, were you never on the edge of so behaving, so that you escaped deadly sin by a hair's breadth only, by a sort of miracle of grace? How can you, how can any one of us ever think enough of God's mercy, in preserving not only our bodies but our souls, so that we have not hitherto finally cast ourselves away, so that we are not yet in hell? How can we ever think enough of it? And yet, alas! there are many of us, who have never had such a thought in their minds; many who, when it does come, make haste to dismiss it as fast as they can.

O Lord, touch our hard hearts that they may feel, and open our blind eyes that we may see!

Lord, lift Thou up
The Light of Thy countenance upon us.

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